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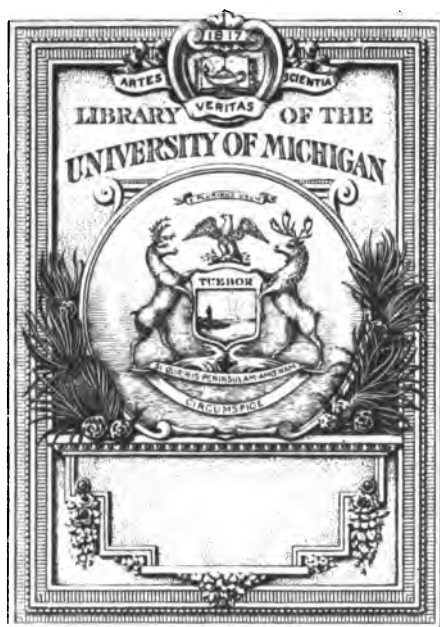
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**THE AMERICAN STAGE
OF TO-DAY**



THE
AMERICAN STAGE
OF
TO-DAY

BY
WALTER PRICHARD EATON



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1908

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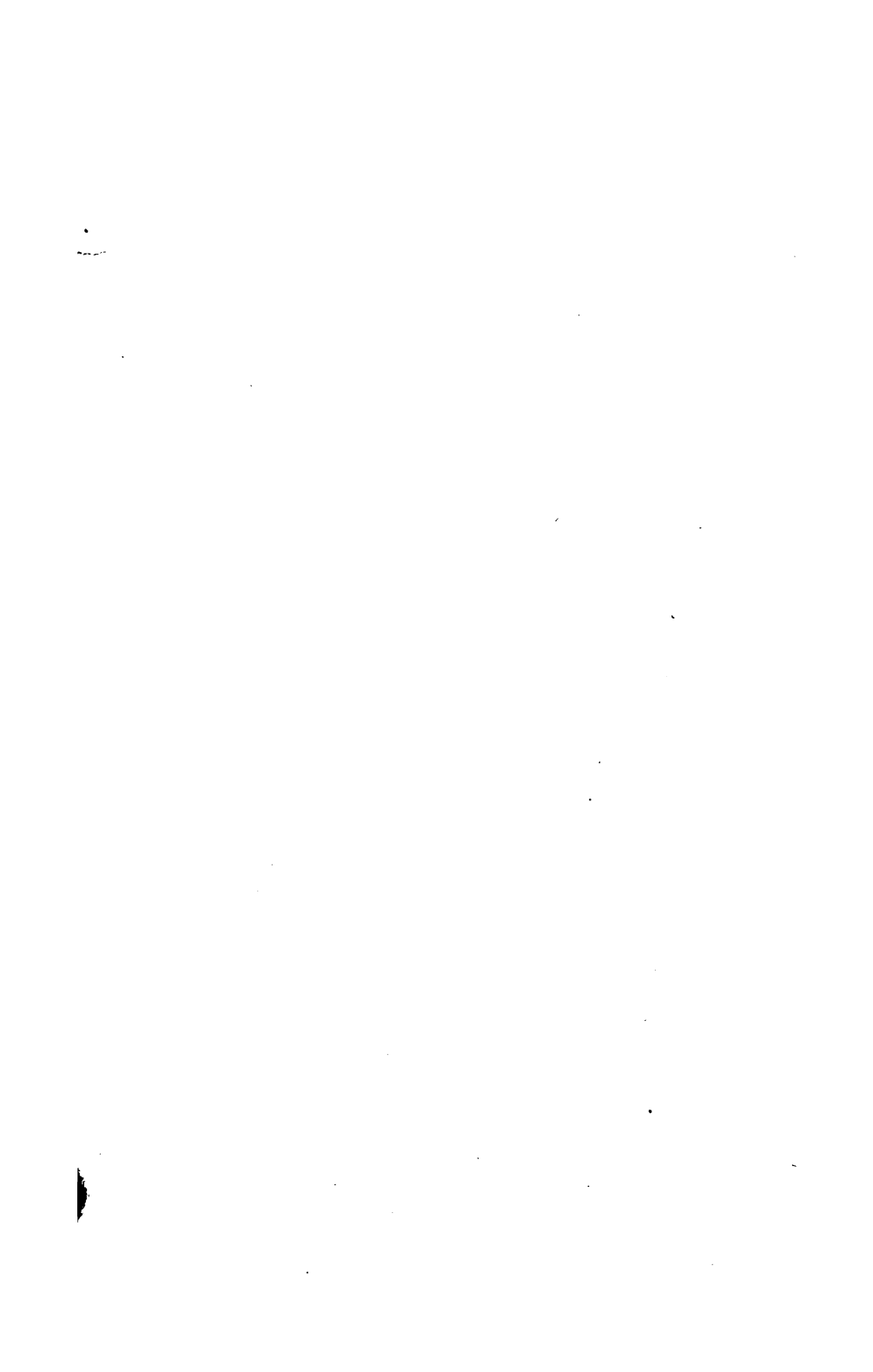
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TO THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER
WARREN E. EATON
WHO FIRST TAUGHT ME TO BE HUMBLE
BEFORE THE GREAT PROBLEM
OF OUR SPEECH

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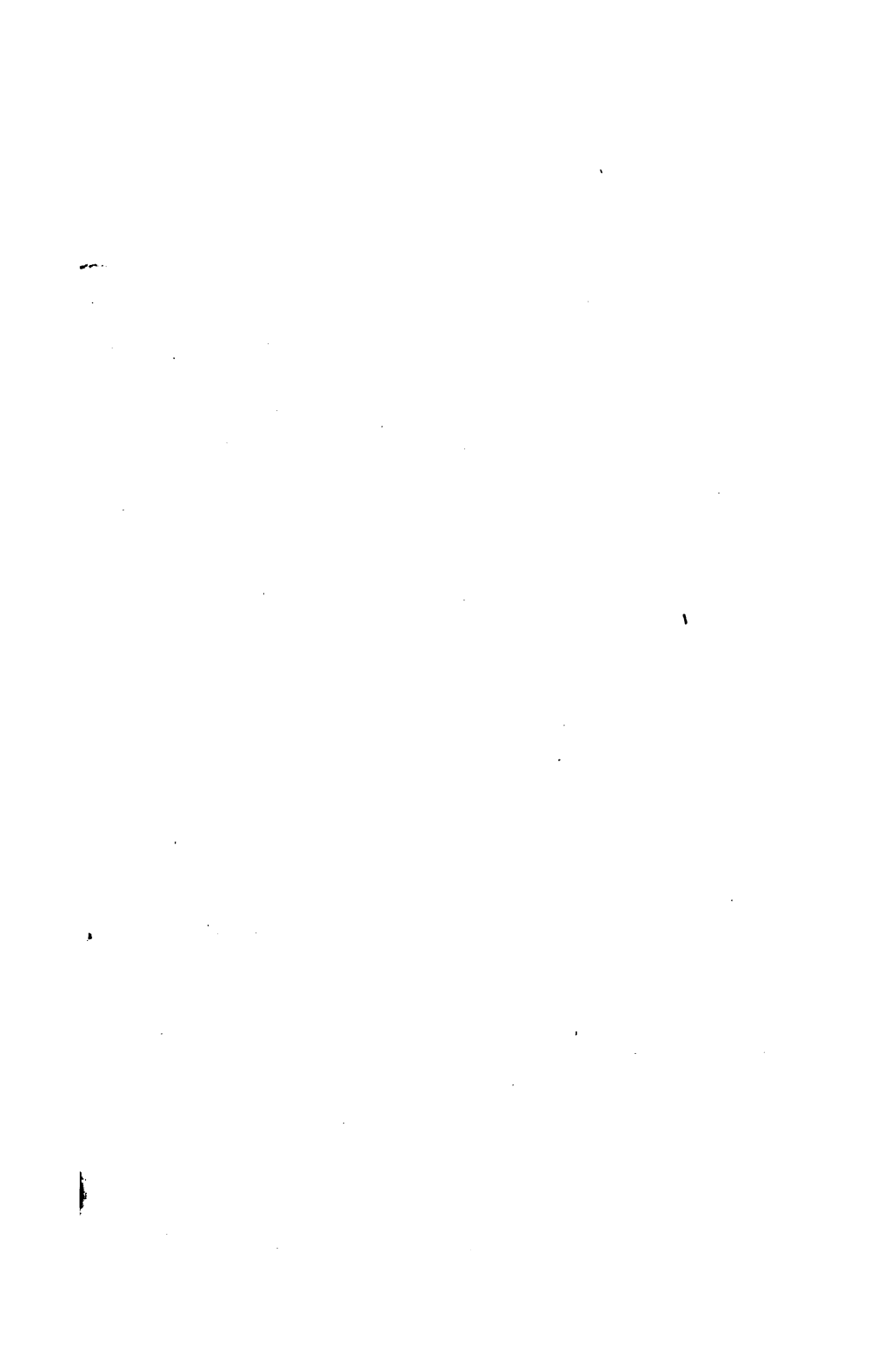


MOST of the papers in this volume are reprinted, though with numerous changes and additions, from the "New York Sun." I wish to acknowledge my debt to the editors of that paper for their permission to reprint. The first and last long papers, and some other portions of the book, are new. If, in a work on the current stage in America, I have said nothing about the so-called Theatrical Syndicate, it is not because I am indifferent to its considerable though sometimes exaggerated evils. It is a subject that does not belong to the critic of æsthetics. It is but a part of a vaster economic condition. The competitor in theatrical management will after all fare quite as well as the competitor in oil—if not better.

W. P. E.

80 WASHINGTON SQUARE, NEW YORK

July, 1908



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**THE AMERICAN STAGE
OF TO-DAY**



THE AMERICAN STAGE OF TO-DAY

BY WAY OF APOLOGY

ONCE upon a time my Boston-bred mother startled me by announcing that the New York *Tribune* is the finest newspaper published. "Why?" I asked. "Because," said she, "it is so soft under the carpets." I was then a member of the *Tribune's* staff, supplying my modest daily share of the great thoughts which found an ignominious and dusty end beneath my mother's mattings. But I could not honestly be offended. The speedy oblivion which overtakes our multitudinous newspapers is as desirable as it is inevitable. If we were pursued by the consequences of our every slightest act, if our memories were crammed with recollection of every minute occurrence of our lives, existence would soon become an impossible burden. Man's greatest accomplishment is the ability to forget, and the daily destruction of yesterday's newspapers is an indispensable aid. Most that the newspapers chronicle is best forgot-

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ten. And the newspapers chronicle many things about the stage.

The perspicacious reader is now prepared to inquire why, holding these estimable sentiments, the author is putting forward a book made up in large measure of theatrical reviews rescued from newspaper oblivion for the immortality of covers. (A pleasant little fiction, this about the immortality of covers, that authors are permitted to indulge in while writing their books!) And the perspicacious reader shall be answered.

His question has the more point as several of the reviews which follow are notices of plays that failed. A play that has failed is in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred about the deadest thing imaginable, much deader than a doornail or Mr. Scrooge's partner. It is so dead that to reprint the funeral oration seems almost an impertinence, if not downright brutality. What good can it possibly do? But, on the other hand, why reprint the review of a play that has succeeded? A good play needs no critic. It goes on delivering its own message, and the wise man will prefer to see it, not read about it. The reason why the author reprints such of the following papers as are reprints has nothing to do with the success or failure of the plays reviewed. It is because he came to the Broadway Theater filled with an ardent desire

to find there truth and passion — not the passion of a *Zaza* smashing the bric-à-brac to express thwarted amorous desire, but the passion of life and living, the glow of intellectual excitement, the thousand zests of daily existence; and he found there, instead of truth and passion, too often a stale conventionality that none but the most childish can possibly believe in, can possibly be aroused by, into thought or emotion. And in varying, sometimes in contrary, moods he wrote about what he saw, — always, however, with the single underlying purpose of considering the stage as a possible reality in American life, not a toyshop nor an Elizabethan relic.

And because the stage in America, especially in that dominant and domineering strip of America known as Broadway, is not yet so widely regarded as a reality that any season can boast of more than two or three native dramas out of fifty which take rank above the mere conventional rehashes of threadbare theatrical tricks, it seems worth while to give as wide publicity as possible to any words of protest, however feeble. We are as a people tremendously given to theater going. Yet as a people we read few books about the stage, much as we read other books; we have but a bowing acquaintance with printed plays. We want what we want when we want it, but to tell

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why we want it would be too often beyond us. Herein follow a few attempts to discover why, in the space of a theatrical season, we wanted certain things and why we did not want others — which is no less significant. The number of such attempts is not so great that the field is overcrowded; and, in this day of the printed page, there is something, perhaps, for which to be grateful.

✓ I make no pretense to a hard and fast theory of the theater. Personally, I doubt if any hard and fast theory of the theater is possible. It is wisest to be "tough minded," as the Pragmatists would say. No sooner would you have your theory nicely joined and dovetailed than along would come some Charles Rann Kennedy with a blunderbuss of a new play and blow it higher than the Singer tower. Thank Heaven for that! The theater lags behind life and even the other arts always, dragged back by a dead weight of convention. The bold actor, the bold dramatist, and, oh! above all, that perhaps not impossible He, the bold manager, are needed. The innovator is the real hero; the idol smasher is on God's side. ✓ Born a Puritan, I have an ingrained reverence for idols — intellectual idols; I am a pretty feeble smasher. But I am ashamed of my weakness, and I firmly trust that I shall never be charged with consistency, and that if I ever do achieve

a theory of the theater I shall not keep it without change for more than two weeks. Life changes, and the theater must change with it.

When it does not, there is a divorce between the drama and life, which is very bad for the former, though life manages to worry along pretty comfortably, being something of a Mormon. I could wish only for this little book that it might aid in maintaining domestic harmony. In that purpose alone I insist on being consistent.

At any rate, I have foiled my mother. She cannot put a book under the carpet.

OUR INFANT INDUSTRY

I ONCE asked James Huneker what the new book he was then writing was about. "About the drama," he replied. "American?" I inquired. "I said about the drama," Mr. Huneker retorted, with a Monalisacal smile. Yet he has always been among the first to encourage American effort towards self-expression in all the arts, writing with equal facility and always breast forward about drama, music, and painting; he has a right to his somewhat bitter jest. It is only those of us who have played the Jeremiah; who have raised our voices in loud lamentation over the lost art of acting as exemplified by Booth and Barrett, Warren and Gilbert; who have sighed for the grandeur that was the Boston Museum stock company and the glory that was Augustin Daly; who scorn Clyde Fitch because he is n't Pinero and George Ade because he is n't Ibsen — it is those of us who have not the right to elevate our noses at that struggling little provincial, the American drama. Philip Hale has said that Emma Eames sings "Who is Sylvia?" as if Sylvia were not on her calling list. That is the attitude of some of us toward

American plays, the attitude, too, in high places. It is not the attitude to foster a native art.

And it is not justified by the facts.

In years not remote there was, to be sure, no such thing as American drama. In the theater the good men do lives after them; the evil is fortunately oft interred with their bones. The winnowing winds of time separate the chaff, and if there is any wheat it lies finally plain to the sight. But the floor of our theater in past generations lay bare. What did our great actors of the past play, in what rôles did they make their mighty reputations, which the graybeards of to-day use like clubs to whack the head of each aspiring actor of the present who tries to push himself up? Shakespeare, Sheridan, Goldsmith, Robertson, Morton (he of "Box and Cox"), Buckstone, Scribe, Dumas — these are typical names of the dramatists who furnished the dramatic fare for our fathers in the theater. The less said about the native drama, perhaps, the better.

Mrs. Mowatt's "Fashion," produced in New York in 1845, was perhaps the first native drama of any considerable merit. Epes Sargent furnished a prologue which contained these significant lines:

Bah! homemade calicoes are well enough,
But homemade dramas ~~must~~ be stupid stuff:
Had it the *London* stamp't would do; but then,
For plays we lack the manners and the men!

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Edgar Allan Poe said the play resembled "The School for Scandal" "as the shell resembles the living locust." But the play had a great success, even in England. It must have contained some truth of observation in its satire of New York society. But even the memory of it has passed away; nor did it even then stem the tide of importations or inspire native successors. Twenty-two years later Augustin Daly wrote "Under the Gaslight," and shortly after "A Flash of Lightning," supposedly realistic dramas of the day. Apparently their realism was all of the "real pump" variety, not much above the level of present-day melodrama. The rescue of the hero who had been bound to the railroad track by the heroine who had been locked in the station was the feature of "Under the Gaslight"! Bronson Howard's farce, "Saratoga," produced in 1870, somewhat more deserved Mr. Daly's catch phrase for his new theater, "contemporaneous human interest." But even that play was antiquated in a few years. Mr. Daly's own play, "Divorce," remotely based on a novel by Trollope, produced in 1871, was described as a "satire on the raw, pretentious, and wealth-worshipping society of the young republic." It was very popular, running for almost a season. But it led to nothing—at least it led Mr. Daly to nothing. For twenty years the stage at his

theater continued to show the same endless list of adaptations from the French or German, the classic comedies, Shakespeare (rudely mutilated in text and clumsily encumbered with scenery), with now and then a new play from London. "Rip van Winkle" and "Uncle Tom's Cabin" were the only American plays that endured, for reasons other than their dramatic merit, though Frank Mayo's "Davy Crockett" was picturesque and sentimentally effective. Twenty-five or thirty years ago Janauschek was playing "Meg Merrilies," Booth was playing "Hamlet" and his "classic" repertoire, Sothorn was playing "Dundreary," John T. Raymond was amusing audiences as *Micawber*, for dramatizations of Dickens were then the vogue. It was all quite innocent and edifying, no doubt, and almighty artistic, but just what it was accomplishing toward the development of an American drama, or how in its endless repetitions of the same old thing it was leading the theater toward anything new or better, is rather hard to see. When the old folks say to us youngsters, "Alas, the actors are all dead now!" let us reply, "Yes? Well, so are most of their plays. There has been some gain, anyhow. You gloried in your actors then? Of course you did; you had to have something of your own to glory in!"

But, curiously coincident with the rise of

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Pinero and Jones in England and keeping step with the sudden spread of Continental influence, especially the influence of Ibsen, over the English-speaking stage, a native American drama began to struggle up that was not mere sentimental treacle or feeble apings of outworn models, but something like an adult art, something with the tingle of reality about it. American writers began to seize hold of American subjects with more than an infantile grip. Along the path blazed by the comedies of Bronson Howard and his "Shenandoah" came Gillette's "Held by the Enemy," and then his splendid "Secret Service," and finally James A. Herne's two pieces of pioneer realism, "Shore Acres" and "Griffith Davenport," the latter produced not quite ten years ago. Clyde Fitch, meanwhile, had laid hold on Nathan Hale for a dramatic hero and lanced contemporaneous frivolous society, and Augustus Thomas had dramatized various states of the Union. With the exception of "Griffith Davenport" (which was very uneven in quality) these plays were accepted by the public; and, having accepted them, the public could not retreat into the past, nor could the playwright. When a child has learned that he can walk, he refuses to crawl. The American playwright had found his legs.

And the problem now is, what use is he

making of his legs, whither is he walking? For the road that the American dramatist took when his work was serious work, work that strove for, if it did not always attain, dignity and truth, was the road of realism. And there are many who always wonder, a little needlessly, perhaps, where realism will lead, what beauty or satisfaction it can give to us when its "photographic fidelity" has ceased to be a novelty.

Very few of us, I fancy, who saw James A. Herne play "Shore Acres" fifteen years ago have forgotten the final moments of that play. Old *Nathan'el Berry*, his troubles laid, his heart at rest, sent every one to bed, walked to the kitchen window and, scratching off a little frost, peered out into the winter night a moment, then made fast the doors, banked the fire, blew out the lamps, and, his candle held high, climbed with slow, aged steps up the stairs to his chamber. At the landing he turned and paused for a last look at the room below, quite dim save for the glow from the fire and the faint flicker of his candle flame. Everything in the old New England kitchen where so much of joy and tragedy had come to fruition, where his life had been lived and his heart almost broken, rested peaceful and still in the red glow, under the benediction of his eye. Then he passed across the bedroom

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threshold and the stage grew still darker. Through a mist of cleansing tears you beheld for a hushed moment the deserted kitchen and knew the power of silence, the still soul of an empty room. Then the curtain sank. It was pantomime raised to poetry, it was the realism of fact doing the work of language, and doing it for once quite as well. The play is still presented every season, though it was written fifteen years ago. How much deeper or more poetically, you ask, have our playwrights wrought since? How far has the prose drama of contemporary life advanced beyond the point where Herne left it? How much nearer is it to the ideal goal of literature? For surely a domestic pantomime, depending for its effect absolutely on a stage and actors, cannot be considered as literature, for it cannot be printed.

And the answer is to be found, of course, in the native dramas which have been written since. Side by side with an increasing readiness on the part of the American public to patronize and enjoy the more advanced drama of Europe, especially the plays of Ibsen, there has come over the native writers an increasing desire to comment on contemporary life as well as to reflect it; we are beginning to find ideas in our drama. And ideas breed style, for they cannot be expressed without language and form, and language cannot express intellectual

processes unless it is carefully chosen, or form unless it is nicely adjusted.

But what is an idea? Heine's coachman said, "An idea? Nu, nu, an idea's an idea! An idea's any damn nonsense a man gets in his head!" It is in this sense that critics are supposed to use the word when they speak of the drama of ideas, especially by those people who "know what they like." (Incidentally, the trouble with such people is that they very seldom *do* know what they like.) An idea in the drama may be defined as rather more a matter of purpose than content. It is a thesis, to be sure, an appeal to the head as well as to the emotions. But in the best dramas it is rather felt than seen, fused, as it should be, with the dramatic action; it tells as dignity, giving a weight and purpose to the play beyond the moment's amusement. It is the author's symbol in his play that a stage story has its meanings and its problems, too, no less than life; for the modern author regards his story as a piece of life. So the idea in "Hamlet" is the tragedy, not of accident and bodily death, but of the irresolute will, of the mind "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought"; and "Hamlet" can be fully enjoyed only by stern, intellectual effort. The idea in "The School for Scandal" is plain enough, and it is not expounded in the screen scene, which is all some later play-

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wrights have copied from the play. The idea in Sudermann's "Magda" is individualism. The idea in each and every one of Ibsen's plays shapes the story, is interwoven in the action, rises like strange vapor into symbols. Yet "Hamlet," "The School for Scandal," "Magda," "A Doll's House," are generally accepted, even by those who know what they like, as absorbing stage stories. Perhaps an idea in a drama is after all but a sign that the author has brains.

Well, our American playwrights, since the Twentieth Century put on its baby shoes and began to toddle toward boyhood, have been acquiring brains. And if there have been but one or two native dramas written since "Shore Acres" with so much of real poetic value, there have been many written with equal naturalness of detail and greater naturalness of plot and deeper intellectual appeal. Without forsaking that truth to contemporary life, that realism of speech and character and incident which was blazed as the path the new American drama should take, our authors have shown undoubted signs of a growing desire and ability to go farther, to reflect on what they portray, to make the facts of life illustrate some truth of conduct, to fashion their dramas, not with the outworn blocks of stage story, but with the living problems of the hour.

We too, in our modest little way, are beginning to have a drama of ideas. And, in one instance at least, a playwright has gone farther still down the rich road of realism and has found poetry at the end. William Vaughn Moody has written "The Great Divide."

Since the century began we have had three plays from Clyde Fitch that have illustrated not only his femininely facile observation of the surface aspects of fashionable life, but a preoccupation with an idea as well. "The Climbers," "The Girl with the Green Eyes," and "The Truth," all had a sincerity of purpose and more than a passing interest as mere stage stories. Unfortunately, Mr. Fitch seems destined never quite to keep a play on a consistent level, if that level is high or serious. Theatricalness marred one play, lack of inevitableness the second, and a gross intrusion of buffoonery the third. For two acts "The Truth" is written with a naturalness of dialogue, a quiet, economic, inevitable development, a grasp of character that rival the best prose drama of modern France. Then farce intrudes; or, if Mr. Fitch objects, as he is said to do, that the characters of the father and the Baltimore boarding-house lady are drawn from life, something so like farce that the effect is the same. The atmosphere of reality is gone, at any rate, the unity of the play

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is shattered. Yet, with every shortcoming allowed for, these three plays by Mr. Fitch mark an advance in American drama along the road of realism toward literature, toward the drama that can be printed and read, because behind the actors and the painted scene is the idea, the appeal to the intelligence, the firm basis of dignity and purpose.

~~X~~ William Gillette has produced nothing of consequence since "Sherlock Holmes," a wildly improbable melodrama made marvelously probable in the theater, not alone by the ingenuity of its construction, but by the naturalness of its method in the writing and the acting. James A. Herne is dead. Bronson Howard is also dead. Besides Mr. Fitch, Augustus Thomas is alone of the important men of the nineties still contributing to our stage along the lines then laid down, and his latest achievement, "The Witching Hour," reviewed at length elsewhere in this volume, is at once the most natural, the most thoughtful, and the most interesting of all his works. It is, in fact, one of the best plays yet produced in America. But chiefly it is to the new writers who have arisen that we must look for our native drama in the immediate future. Of them all — alas, not too numerous a band! — William Vaughn Moody seems easily the leader; a judgment one does not hesitate to make, though it is based

on a single play. Mr. Moody sprang full-armed out of the University of Chicago, where he was a professor of English, like Minerva from the brow of Jove; and "The Great Divide," which Margaret Anglin and Henry Miller had brought East from Chicago without attracting any attention by the way, swam into our ken at the Princess Theater, New York, on October 3, 1906, like a new planet. Its success was instantaneous with critics and public. Written in a nervous, highly wrought, imaginative prose that flashed out similes worthy of Shelley and yet did no violence to dramatic propriety, the new play gave the beholder a sense of style and literary distinction as rare as it was refreshing. Discussion waged, and will no doubt wage as long as the play is given, regarding the probability of the incident on which the scheme of the action is based, — the continued acceptance of *Stephen*, a rough miner, who had come to her cabin bent on rape, by *Ruth*, a girl of Puritan New England. But, this premise once granted, the action moves with utter naturalness, with speed, directness, and a fine economy of method to the end. Personally, I find no difficulty in granting Mr. Moody his premise; I am willing to grant nearly anything as possible in the ways of a woman with a man. But if I did find difficulty, that would not affect

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the value of the play, which is a drama of two souls clashing each on each. The external means used to bring them into conflict does not matter much, for the interest is not there. As a painter falsifies the light on his landscape to throw some salient object, the soul of it, into high relief, and thus wins perhaps a deeper truth, so Mr. Moody might forgivably have been more careless about probability than he was — if he *was* careless at all, which I do not for a moment admit.

A drama of two souls, that is "The Great Divide," a struggle between the old Puritan formalism of conscience and Pragmatism, between what William James would call the tender-minded and the tough-minded temperaments. In certain moods *Ruth* and *Stephen* seem to me very real human beings; in other moods they are but abstractions transcending the personal, symbols of those inborn tendencies of soul that underlie all our emotions, all our reasonings, that are the deepest, the most powerful forces in human life. No other American play has ever gone so deep, has ever seized hold of so powerful an idea; and no other American play has ever wrought an idea into a dramatic story with such dignity and grace of language, such poetry of image and emotion. One is almost tempted to say that no other American play has ever found the

soul. From a drunken impulse to rape, *Stephen* rises step by step to nobility, because for him the rightness of an action is in its result, moral truth is found in his own nature's shrinking or expansion. Sin may be a stepping-stone to salvation, not because of any evangelistic "repentance," but because it shows him the good which he takes, letting the rest go forgotten. *Ruth*, on the other hand, though a dim, primitive impulse urged her at first to *Stephen*, — an impulse so deep that by most of us, perhaps, it is never felt, lying far down in our souls, and we say *Ruth's* action is "grossly improbable," — was fettered by conscience, that composite of a thousand years of religious and social formalism. The chain of nuggets *Stephen* paid to the other ruffian to buy her for himself was to her a burning badge of shame, and with true New England chop-logic she felt that she had in some way atoned when by her own toil she had bought it back. It was her scarlet letter, no less scarlet for the formality of a marriage ceremony. It is surprising, in an American play, how little the marriage ceremony figures in "The Great Divide." Mr. Moody has gone behind it. In this soul-drama externals are burned away, and primal things, becoming naked, become decent, become wonderful. *Ruth* finally left *Stephen* for her staid New England home, not

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able to see the new *Stephen* who had risen from the old, not able to forget the drunken ruffian who had burst into her cabin bent on rape, not able to win out of error the precious good, but demanding a truth perfect from the beginning, an absolute perfection. And thus she would have wrecked two lives for a tradition and violated the mystic impulse deep in her heart that drove her still toward *Stephen*. But he would not have it so. He followed her East. He won her fully for himself at last. The soul that faces morning and the rising sun, that sees good and evil, sin and righteousness, as alike but rungs on the ladder of happiness, was finally triumphant. And the poet who wrote this play, his first, is still a young man, promising many new dramas for our stage. He is the most thoughtful, imaginative, and cultured playwright we now boast, and his substantial success should encourage more men of literary training and high ideals to write for the theater. There is plenty of room for them.

Two plays that in the seasons just past have had tremendous vogue are "The Lion and the Mouse," by Charles Klein, and "The Man of the Hour," by George Broadhurst. Neither play can take high rank as a finished drama, and neither author is a newcomer to our theater, but both plays illustrate the increasing

intellectual drift of the stage. In the former the overshadowing problem of the trusts finds a steady, if feeble and distorted, reflection; in the latter, graft in municipal politics is the theme. In the former Mr. Klein defeats a billionaire magnate by a woman's wit; in the latter Mr. Broadhurst combats graft by finding an honest candidate and electing him. Neither solution, perhaps, is wholly convincing! But fifteen years ago no manager would have dared to set either problem on the stage, nor would it have occurred to Mr. Klein or Mr. Broadhurst to ask him to do so. Realism is pulling even our weaker writers into line with life and stirring up their mental machinery.

To speak of "Ben Hur" or "The Music Master," the two most popular plays, if the number of performances be taken as a standard, that have gone forth from Broadway in the last decade, as examples of American or any other kind of realism would be to laugh. Why "Ben Hur" has been so enormously patronized, a thing of bombastic rhetoric, inflated scenery, pasteboard piety, and mechanical excitement, one cannot explain without being branded a hopeless cynic. "The Music Master," a piece of mid-Victorian sentimentality for all the external truthfulness of its setting, of course won its way into all hearts by virtue of the exquisite and compelling art of David

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Warfield. Public discernment in the theater is a slow growth and starts at the top. Down through each layer of the public you come upon other layers still, to revel in the paste-board piety of "Ben Hur" or to hail "Way Down East" as a masterpiece in the same breath with "Shore Acres." The success of such plays at any period is not significant. The critic of the theater, on the watch for new tendencies, for signs of growth, will find significant the success of those plays written by men who have something new to say. Among such writers, besides Mr. Moody, the seasons immediately past have produced Miss Rachel Crothers and Eugene Walter. The former, in "The Three of Us," displayed a rare feeling for quiet, significant naturalism, even though her third-act scene was the inevitable bachelor's apartment, her villain the inevitable woman's villain who never drew the breath of life. It is Miss Crother's promise some day, perhaps, in stage stories to bring a woman's tact and insight to bear on our vexed domestic problems. Mr. Walter's talent is essentially, almost scornfully, masculine. Sometimes one very nearly accuses him of belonging to the "good red blood" school. His merits are a strong, if untutored, grasp on dramatic effects, and apparently a desire, not always controlled as yet, to tear the fourth wall out of every

room, to get life upon the stage even if he has to be rude about it. He has shown us two plays, both in the season of 1907-8, "The Wolf" and "Paid in Full." The former is a stilted melodrama of the Canadian north woods, but with something of the forest gloom so haunting it that you feel the author's intention to have been greater than his achievement. The latter, reviewed elsewhere in this volume, comes near to being a social study of New York life, realistic, dramatic, informed with a valuable idea.


Other playwrights we have also, and one of them, at least, George Ade, has reflected certain phases of American life as truthfully as could be asked. "The College Widow" was a genre picture of triumphant skill, executed with exuberant yet loving humor. But Mr. Ade has no power of dramatic development. He cannot penetrate the surface. Percy MacKaye, a young playwright of unusual scholarship and unbending idealism, is the only one of our newer dramatic authors to write in verse for the practical theater. Two of his plays, "The Canterbury Pilgrims," a poetic comedy with Chaucer and the *Wife of Bath* as the leading characters, and "Fenris the Wolf," a Wagnerian libretto, have not been produced, but Miss Marlowe has played his "Jeanne d'Arc" both here and in London, and

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Bertha Kalisch produced his "Sappho and Phaon," a tragedy. Neither was successful enough to warrant the assertion that Mr. MacKaye is the dramatic poet to lead the wandering tribes of the Twentieth Century into the promised land of blank verse. Mr. MacKaye's prose drama, "The Scarecrow," based on Hawthorne's "Feathertop," seems at present his most effective work, though it has not yet been shown save between covers. Its demands on the scenic artist and on the leading actor are severe, but there is an uncanny suggestion of the supernatural in it and a pathos cross shot with the grim humor of Hawthorne which ought to place it on the stage. It is the least conventional in theme and treatment of its author's plays, and the most directly wrought. Mr. MacKaye has also written a prose comedy of character, "Mater," which will be produced by Henry Miller. Here, with light and graceful touch, the author has a little fun with the unbending Socialists and political reformers, and in the person of *Mater* herself, a lyrical child-woman who impersonates her own daughter to aid her son, to the disgust of the daughter and the rage of the son, but who in reality is the most sensible and efficient person in the play, he has created a character of charm and originality. The moral of "Mater" is not, perhaps, quite clear — if

that is a fault. The satire is too gentle to point a purpose, save the purpose to show a curious type of New England woman. Mr. MacKaye as dramatist lacks a certain clarity and incisiveness. His plays do not quite *bite*. But no one can spend an hour in his presence without feeling the tonic of his fine spirit, of his sincerity and idealism. Like Mr. Moody, he has the grace of culture and of lyric speech. He will surely find his honorable place on our stage, though it will hardly be by fleeing to Greek or Norse mythology.

These authors, then, who are bringing to bear on the problem of creating an American drama the largest amount of dramatic skill, truthful observation, intelligent reflection, and passion for reality are the ones who are keeping our drama connected with life, who are leading our stage on toward better things by making it a vital force in the community. Only two of them, it will be noted, are poets. They alone have the sense of literary style to strike out beautiful language. "The Great Divide" and Mr. MacKaye's dramas alone perhaps fully bear the test of print. We need not worry, however. Our stage is not yet so flooded with reality that we need alarm ourselves about the drift of realism. We shall need more of it before we need less, and it is not by fleeing reality but by plunging through



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it that, for the modern mind, the deeper truth is found. Already the intellectual thesis is creeping into our plays of contemporary life. The mere scenic fidelity of Belasco seems tame, old-fashioned. Already Mr. Moody has broken through into spiritual poetry, and Mr. Thomas has brought the occult home to daily life. The realists may very well be left to themselves. They will work out their own dramatic salvation — and ours. They are on the one inevitable road to-day. Let us leave them with the words of T. E. Brown, the Manx poet, who, in one of those wonderful letters of his, wrote:

“You comfort me much by kind words of sympathy. I hope you don’t often find me in a melancholic mood. But now and then I dare say I’m rather like an old cat; ‘slickin’ mee-self with mee own slaver.’ You’ve seen the like? You stroke them a bit, and they’re pleased enough with that for a change. But they go on, slick, slick, slick, till the melancholy is gone, and behold ye! they’re out in the bushes after them blackbirds, ‘as bowl’ as bowl’.”

There still are blackbirds and there still is blank verse. But just now we must slick, slick, slick.

“THE WITCHING HOUR”

(HACKETT, November 18, 1907)

IT is only too easy to write of Augustus Thomas's new play, "The Witching Hour," produced with John Mason in the leading part. From no matter what point of view you survey this drama it repays you with humor, or emotion, or subject for debate, or wonder at Mr. Thomas's protean personality, or, if you are a psychic researcher, a disciple's joy. It was not many weeks before its production that Mr. Thomas exhibited "The Ranger" at Wallack's Theatre, which, if it is remembered at all, will be recalled as a clumsy, trivial, and ineffective melodrama, devoid alike of style and idea. "The Witching Hour," on the other hand, is instinct with dramatic style, and finely and firmly wrought into its texture, suspended in every act and almost every situation, is an idea. The two plays are as far apart as the poles — almost as far apart as Ibsen and Theodore Kremer. It seems almost incredible that the same man could have written them at the same period of his career. Perhaps he did n't. Perhaps "The Ranger" was

a skeleton fished up from that trunk all authors keep under their beds, and its bones decked out to fill an order. Which is another argument for keeping the lid down! Certainly, however, "The Witching Hour" was written *con amore*, and represents on the whole the ripest work Mr. Thomas has yet put forth. It represents work so ripe, indeed, that it bears about it in every line traces of the most modern influences; its appeal is ever half to the intellect, though its grip on the mere theatrical "story" is firm and sure; it is a successful venture by the author of "Arizona" into the drama of ideas. With the most humble apologies to Mr. Thomas, whose prejudices on the subject have been expressed, one even ventures to say it is an example of Ibsen in America.

There is something so slyly comical in that last idea that one is tempted to pause and dally with it. Unless a none too trustworthy memory has entirely forsaken us, Mr. Thomas has on more than one occasion repudiated any interest in Ibsen; he has scorned his subject matter and spelled America large, after the fashion of speakers full of baked meats. Yet here he is writing a drama where "the ghost of a woman influenced a decision of the Supreme Court of the United States"; where telepathy and hypnotism play leading rôles; where the mental attitude of five hundred thou-

sand excited Kentuckians influences a jury shut up in a room; where, in short, the things which abide "below the threshold" of human consciousness, the dim, unproved, disturbing facts of life — if facts they be — are the ghostly protagonists of the play. Does Mr. Thomas suppose he could have done this if Ibsen had not shown him how, — yes, and shown the public how to understand him? Does he suppose — granting that he could have written the play fifteen years ago — the Hackett Theater would have been packed at every performance to see it? If he likes, let us just attribute the influence to telepathy. Let us say he never saw an Ibsen play performed, never read one, never heard of "The Master Builder." Let us conceive of him as shut up in New Rochelle, far from the madding drama, where news from the outer world does not penetrate. But five hundred thousand of his fellow countrymen have been whipped into reluctant attendance on the Ibsen drama, and there has dawned on them a great light, on them and on certain men who write plays for them. They have become dissatisfied with the artificial, the conventional, the old trite repetitions of stage formulas. They have come to look for a technique that should go below the mere tricks of climax and surprise, for a picture of life that should go deeper than theatrical convention,

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for realism that should be real and situations that should call not alone for the easy laugh or tear, but for those doubts and puzzles and searching speculations that make life at once so strange and so worth while. And the combined thoughts about the drama of these five hundred thousand did beat upon New Rochelle and upon the brain of Mr. Thomas, and, lo! he did write "The Witching Hour." And when he surveyed his work and saw that it was good, did he parody *Frank Hardmuth* in Act III and say, "I wonder how in hell I did that?" Or did he communicate at once with Professor Hyslop? Perhaps he even made the forty-five minute trip to Broadway and saw "The Master Builder." Who knows?

Which brings us down to the serious business at hand: What is there in telepathy? It may be said at once that with the theatrical effectiveness of "The Witching Hour" there is no quarrel, nor with the acting of it. As the copper wire is in a sense the first essential to the transmission of a telephone message, so a well made, well told story is the first essential to the transmission of such a message as Mr. Thomas speaks in this play. And that essential he has in the main admirably supplied, and has been uncommonly well aided by his players. In spite of the unusual quality of so many causes — telepathy and hypnotism — the effects

are handled with quiet, truthful realism, the story progresses with the smoothness and precision of machinery, there is no violence done to probabilities either of incident or character, excepting, for the time being, such violences as may inhere in the telepathic and hypnotic premises. And even these are so handled that while the play is in action they carry you, however skeptic, to a kind of momentary belief.

The story is not intricate. The scene opens in Louisville, in the richly furnished home of *Jack Brookfield*, a professional gambler and art connoisseur, a figure suggested, perhaps, by Richard Canfield. The game in *Jack Brookfield's* house is always "on the square." He is, according to his lights, a man of honor, with a warm, affectionate nature. But twenty years before, he says, he found wild oats so profitable that he stayed in that branch of the grain business. He has a niece, his ward, who is his pet. She has two suitors, *Frank Hardmuth*, assistant prosecuting attorney, a "practical politician" and rather too savory of stage villainy to be wholly convincing, and *Clay Whipple*, a charming youth, son of a woman who years before would have married *Brookfield* but for his profession. (She is providentially a widow when the play begins, so that *Jack* can win her in the end.) The time is after midnight when the first-act curtain

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rises — the witching hour. *Brookfield* is entertaining *Mrs. Whipple*, *Clay*, and others. There is no game while they are there. *Justice Prentice*, of the United States Supreme Court, a stranger to *Brookfield*, calls to see a certain Corot, a genuine Corot — the playwright must be granted some license! Here is the first hint of the underlying idea of the drama. For as the *Justice* looks at the picture he says, "No, I could n't pay six thousand five hundred dollars." *Brookfield* is amazed. He has not spoken, but that was the price he was thinking to himself. He speaks of it to the *Justice*, who tells him that such phenomena of thought transference are acknowledged by science, and that he is apparently a man of exceptional powers in such direction. The *Justice* departs, promising to send *Jack* books on the subject. *Jack's* puzzled musings are rudely interrupted by the entrance of a drunken young man who has been forcing *Clay* to look at his scarf pin, a cat's-eye. *Clay* has an inherited neurasthenic aversion to that stone. As the other man shoves it under his face, in a fit of blind panic he strikes his tormentor with a huge ivory paper knife, felling him to the floor, dead.

The second act shifts the scene to *Justice Prentice's* rooms in Washington, one year later. Again it is midnight. *Justice Prentice* and

Justice Henderson are sitting together. The one is a lover of poetry and pictures, a believer in the occult, sweetly, lovably sentimental; the other is dry, matter-of-fact, shrewdly humorous. The scene between them, delicately wrought, written in language that differentiates the two and yet brands both of them as men of long legal training, quietly comic and yet informing of the events of the play, is one of the most nearly flawless passages in modern American drama. *Clay*, it seems, was sentenced to be hanged, but the case has been carried on appeal to the Supreme Court on a constitutional point. *Justice Prentice* refuses to agree with his bench-mate that a new trial should be granted. The latter departs as *Brookfield* enters. *Jack* tells the *Justice* of his development in telepathic and hypnotic powers. He is quite evidently disturbed, and the *Justice* still further disturbs him by suggesting that such powers carry grave responsibilities of right living and thinking. Then *Clay's* mother and his sweetheart — *Jack's* niece — come in.

Here Mr. Thomas perhaps stretches the long arm of coincidence pretty far. Yet it is not an impossible circumstance. *Mrs. Whipple*, it is disclosed, is the daughter of the *Justice's* boyhood sweetheart, whom for some reason he did not marry. *Mrs. Whipple* has just discovered in an old album of her mother's a letter

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from the *Justice* bearing on her aversion to cat's-eyes. *Justice Prentice* recalls the circumstance, and declares that here is new evidence; he will go to Louisville himself to testify in a new trial. He lies nobly. He says he had already made up his mind to agree for a new trial on the constitutional point already raised. Left alone, he listens as the clock strikes two. He picks up a miniature of his old sweetheart. "Your ghost was in this room to-night," he says, "and influenced a decision of the Supreme Court of the United States."

The third act is again in *Brookfield's* house, late at night. The new trial is over, the jury out, — not a novel way of gaining suspense, but given an entirely new import by Mr. Thomas, for, as he waits, *Brookfield* attempts by telepathy to influence one of the jurymen. Furthermore, possessing the knowledge that *Hardmuth* planned the assassination of the Governor of Kentucky a few years before, he has made that charge in the newspapers. *Hardmuth*, now the prosecuting attorney, has hounded *Clay* from jealousy. The charges against him, read by five hundred thousand excited Kentuckians, are bound to stir up popular sentiment in *Clay's* behalf. Going further in his belief in telepathy than *Brookfield*, *Justice Prentice* affirms that five hundred thousand people cannot all be thinking about one

thing without influencing a jury, though locked up in a courthouse. Apparently Mr. Thomas would have us believe so too, for *Clay* is set free. Then *Hardmuth* rushes in to shoot *Brookfield*, shoving a revolver against his breast. *Jack* switches a light on over his foe's face, startling him into attention. "You can't shoot me," he says. "You can't pull that trigger. You can't even hold that gun." The gun falls with a crash to the floor. "I'd like to know how in hell you did that!" says the dazed *Hardmuth* as the curtain falls.

The last act, once more at midnight, unlike some last acts, takes the story into new regions; the play is not done when the conventional climax has been reached. Experimenting with a deliciously comical Kentucky sport, *Brookfield* finds that he can tell what cards the other holds. He feels that unconsciously he has been exercising such power all his life, which explains his "luck." Just so, in a less definite way, *Master Builder Solness* accounted for his luck. With that discovery his card playing is forever over. His sister tells him that his belief in his power to influence the thoughts of others is foolish, morbid. "That is something we shall never know in this life," he answers, "but we can all live as if it were true." Against the protest of the other characters, he tells *Clay* that he holds the fatal cat's-eye in

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his closed fist, and makes the trembling boy put his hand over it. *Clay* thrills with horror and aversion. *Brookfield* lets him suffer to the full. Then he opens his palm, disclosing — a latchkey! The boy is cured. Finally, his last action is to help *Hardmuth* escape out of the State, for the assassination *Hardmuth* had planned *Brookfield* had one day conceived as possible in exactly the way it was executed. Knowing the influence he had always exerted over *Hardmuth*, he felt himself in a measure guilty (again we recall the *Master Builder* and his brooding conscience). So the play closes. The mild "love interests," that have neither obtruded nor been missed, are, it might be added, satisfactorily adjusted, but the real interest has been in *Brookfield's* adventures amid subconscious phenomena, and in the lesson Mr. Thomas would have them teach — that our thoughts are dynamic as well as our words, that human responsibility is a more terrible thing than some of us know or admit.

The play is beautifully acted, to aid in the illusion. John Mason may always be relied on for a good performance in any part. Here he is the gentleman gambler with artistic tastes who won his way to a fine cleanliness and strength of character. His growth of character, still more his puzzled wrestling with psychic phenomena, are firmly, quietly, and

finely rendered by Mr. Mason. But the most notable performance, in some ways, is that of Russ Whytal as *Justice Prentice*. His work stands out for a single very definite reason. He is called upon to portray a Supreme Court Justice, a man of great intellectual force and dignity and deep spiritual nature; and he does it. How many times we have seen cabinet ministers, statesmen, poets, generals, imaginary or drawn from history, represented on the stage, and how seldom have they been more than so many actors trying to appear grave, or learned, or profound! What is more sad than the sight of the ordinary actor affecting intellectual profundity? It is as incongruous as would be the sight of President Eliot or William James playing pool in the Lambs Club. The old-time actors had a way of getting around the difficulty; they did it by means of a statuesque demeanor, a sonorous voice, and, if possible, blank-verse dialogue. But men of intellectual profundity are seldom of statuesque demeanor, nor are their voices universally sonorous; and their conversation does not in ordinary circumstances differ materially from our own, except there is less of it. The modern actor in a modern play, if his author is unwise enough to give him a man of intellectual force to portray, is confronted by a task far more difficult perhaps than many a

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"classic" rôle presents. Such a task Russ Whytal accomplishes with apparent ease. How does he do it? Not by any affectations of dignity, any posturings of grave learnedness, any pomposities or strut. He was wise enough to know that such things are of the traditional theater. But he does it by observing life itself, by maintaining a simple, unaffected bearing, the smiling, kindly naturalness of a man truly large and wise. Perhaps Mr. Whytal has mingled often with such men—as it was Booth's object in founding the Players Club that his fellows should do, for Booth was a truly large and wise man himself and saw the dangers that beset the actor. Surely Mr. Whytal has observed them, understood them, understood the particular character of *Judge Prentice*. And he has imitated them, not other actors; he has given to his *Judge* not only the bearing of intellectual force, but of that peculiar judicial force which subtly differentiates a justice from his fellows. Mr. Whytal's performance is essentially realistic, essentially modern; it belongs in spirit to the new drama. And yet what scoffer, what ancient graybeard, can say that it is not lovely, that it is not indeed poetic?

Again we are brought to the question, What is there in telepathy? If there is a better question to start a discussion than this, the writer

has yet to find it. There is a well-known artist in New York who affirms, and whose wife supports him, that before their marriage he could will her to do so and so when she was absent from him and she would do it; and that since their marriage, if he is reading, say, a tale of Poë downstairs at 2 A. M. and gasps at a shivery climax, she will scream in her sleep up in the chamber. Instances of the case in hand in the play — the reading of cards by telepathy — can be recited doubtless by the score by believers. On the other hand, in the 1906 edition of Bramwell's work on “Hypnotism” he says: “After many years of hypnotic work and frequent opportunities of investigating the experiments of others, I have seen nothing, absolutely nothing, which might be fairly considered as affording even the slightest evidence of the existence of telepathy, or any of the so-called ‘occult’ phenomena.” He then describes a series of experiments in reading cards conducted by a committee of the Society for Psychical Research, where the subjects were generally hypnotized, and so abnormally susceptible (*Brookfield* in the play was not in a hypnotic state), and states that the percentage of correct guesses fell “far below the number which ought to have been reached according to the laws of chance.” But he leaves Mr. Thomas this loophole: “Despite all this

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it would be unphilosophic to deny the possibility of telepathy, and I am quite ready to be convinced of its existence if any one can divine even as few as six out of every dozen cards selected by the operator under circumstances similar to those described." But Sir Oliver Lodge, in a recent number of Harper's Monthly, says: "The first fact established by the society's labor was the reality of telepathy — that is to say, of the apparently direct action of one mind on another by means unknown to science. That a thought or image or impression or emotion in the mind of one person can arouse a similar impression in the mind of another person sufficiently sympathetic and sufficiently at leisure to attend and record the impression is now proved. But the mechanism whereby it is done, or even if there is anything that can be likened to physical mechanism at all, is still unknown." The truth is, science as yet knows nothing about telepathy, thought transference, and the like. If it cannot very stoutly affirm, neither can it deny. The whole subject lies in the misty borderland of this world of mind and matter. And whatever Mr. Thomas himself believes, he hit on a subtle way alike to confound his critics and to stimulate and excite the interest of his audiences.

But when we come to hypnotism, science has a word to say. Here we are still on debatable

ground, to be sure, but ground where some milestones already emerge from the mist; some things are clear and certain. There has been and still is much popular misunderstanding of hypnotism; much hysterical rot is believed about it. Braid found it a superstition, dominated by the theories of mesmerism (the transference of "vital fluid" from operator to subject) in 1841. When he died, in 1860, he left it on the way to becoming a science. He had shown that the hypnotic state (the name is his as well as the scientific affirmation of the facts) is not objective but subjective. And he was in a way to the theory now pretty generally held that the hypnotic state is but an unloosing of the forces of the "subliminal self," which recent psychology has shown find their way to influence even "normal" actions and play a great part in the religious life. It is absurd that only certain people can hypnotize or be hypnotized. Any intelligent doctor can be taught the trick; it can even be taught to a subject so that he can hypnotize himself. And it has been proved that about ninety-four per cent of the adult human race are capable of being hypnotized. Of this six per cent remainder a large portion is made up of the imbecile and insane, who cannot be influenced. Another error still prevalent is that weak-willed people are more easily subjected. The

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contrary is the case, for, as a rule, fixity of attention is required to bring about the hypnotic state. But the chief popular error that modern practice has tended to disprove, almost without a shadow of question, is the picturesque notion that the hypnotized subject loses his volitional power, is at the mercy of the man who has hypnotized him. In 1897 Bernheim still maintained that five out of a hundred subjects could be made to do anything; that is, to commit crimes or acts contrary to their normal impulses and moral sense. But other and more recent investigations take away even these five, and declare that not only in the hypnotic state is the volitional power alive, but the moral sense is even keener than at other times. You cannot make a subject do what he absolutely does n't want to do, is the latest dictum. Finally, it was stated by Braid that no one can be "affected by hypnotism at any stage of the process unless by voluntary compliance," and it is equally certain to-day that mere fear of hypnotism absolutely precludes its possibility. There cannot be an unwilling subject.

The application of this to "The Witching Hour" is quite apparent. *Brookfield* saves his life by hypnotizing a man who has jammed a revolver against his breast to shoot. "I'd like to know how in hell you did that!" says the

foiled villain, coming out of his “sleep” with astonishing rapidity.

Precisely. That is the question you too ask when you leave the playhouse. It is to the credit of Mr. Thomas’s story-telling ability that if you are easily moved in the theater you don’t ask it on the spot. That *Brookfield* should hypnotize a man in the flash of an eye, especially a man over whom he had exerted an influence for some years, is quite believable, provided the man consented. Many physicians can hypnotize as quickly. But that he should hypnotize a man who most certainly was not giving his consent, and should make him do the very thing he most certainly did not want to do, is a hard pill to swallow. It is true that *Hardmuth* did not expect to be hypnotized and so was not actively, only negatively, opposed. It is true that the suggestions followed were not contrary to his moral sense, but in line with it, not to shoot, but to refrain from shooting. And it is true, as a physician has pointed out, that his mind was tremendously concentrated, and so in one sense prepared for hypnotic influence. It is also true that there are no cases on record in the scientific libraries of hypnotism used as a means of self-defence against a murderer, as a kind of mental jiu-jitsu. Perhaps nobody can say without danger of error — certainly no mere dramatic reporter

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—that this climax of Mr. Thomas's is not possible. But the known facts are against its possibility, certainly its probability. It is a mighty monstrous pill to swallow. It is too violent; its final effect is to weaken rather than strengthen the structure of the play.

But swallow the pill or not as you like, scoff or not as your skepticism or credulity dictates at the telepathy, there still remains in "The Witching Hour" a human story, crisply, naturally, strongly told; there still remains the medicinal effect of a mild hypnotism applied with no little philosophic and psychologic insight in the last act, not the shallow, or bromide, philosophy of the usual drama; there still remains the imaginative skill displayed in weaving through the warp of concrete facts the woof of airy things and things intangible. Mr. Thomas has surely added nothing to science; he may even have exceeded what science and common sense allow him of hypnotic and telepathic phenomena. But this at least he has done, and well done; he has reached down through the crust of the commonplace for the dim fires that smolder beneath, and in a drama of truth and power he has set a coal from those fires to glow unceasingly. His attempt was audacious, fine; his achievement deserving of a fine reward.

"PAID IN FULL"

(Astoria, February 25, 1908)

MARRY in haste and repent in Harlem" might very well serve as a motto for Eugene Walter's new American play, "Paid in Full." President Eliot of Harvard has frequently complained that so many young men abstain from matrimony until they are thirty. Mr. Walter in the first act of his play has given the learned president an answer. Better a dumb-waiter and no servant, at the other end of the subway where love is, than to dwell where the bedrooms are actually on a separate floor? No doubt, no doubt! But mixed up with poor human nature's brighter part is pride, and a certain craving for creature comforts, and other unfortunate traits. And mixed up with our social and economic system are city rents as lofty as the cave dwellings where we live in layers, and high prices for the indispensable luxuries of life as well as for the less important necessities, and small salaries paid to the youngsters. And if the young men do not marry before they are thirty and rear three children to roam

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the vast spaces of a Harlem flat, to fatten in the healthful Harlem air, there is something to be said in defense of them. It was because Mr. Walter said it in his first act, and said it well, said it through the medium of action and characters, not by spouting a thesis, and said it too, in such a manner that the human story of his play got silently and swiftly and entertainingly under way, that when the first curtain fell on the opening night hope was extraordinarily high in the hearts of his audience. But this hope was only in part realized by subsequent acts, and it is important to see exactly why, for Mr. Walter is a dramatist far too valuable in promise not to be handled with the utmost severity. He is a man who should go on, treating his work ever more seriously and truthfully, finding in his first success, in spite of praise or royalties, at best a partial failure. He ought to have the stuff in him to be, after his first success, one of the most discontented men in New York.

Joseph Brooks (surely Mr. Walter meant no harm when he named his villain after one of our more or less prominent theatrical managers!) is a young man employed as collector by *Captain Williams*, head of the Latin-American Steamship Line. He has married a nice girl named *Emma*, rushing in where angels fear to wed, and the opening act discloses them

in their Harlem flat, at the humble task of washing the dishes and clearing up the dining room, for they are too poor to afford a maid. *Joe* is a temperry, discontented sort of person, who has been more and more embittered every time other men in his office have had a raise in salary while he has not. *Captain Williams* was, it appears, formerly in command of a piratical Pacific sealer — a hard, wolfish, cruel man, now in business as then on the deck of his ship. Even before he appears on the scene, although the weakness of *Joe's* character is apparent, you yet feel sympathy for the lad. The iron hand of the social system is heavy upon him, and like many another weak and egotistical man he supposes that it is against him. Hence his undigested socialism. *James Smith*, an unsuccessful suitor for *Emma's* hand, who is still her devoted friend and unselfishly interested in *Joe's* welfare, hits the nail on the head when he says: "If *Joe* had got his ten-dollar raise to-day he'd be howling for capital. There are lots of such Socialists."

There are; and it was Mr. Walter's great opportunity to continue the character he sketched so admirably in his opening act. When *Captain Williams* comes to the flat with *Emma's* mother and sister, two characters needlessly exaggerated, out of farce in fact, distinct blots on the texture of the drama, *Joe* breaks

in upon him with a hot-headed tirade, a fire-eating, defiant invective that is at once melodramatically stirring, an exposition of character, both of *Joe's* and the *Captain's*, an excellent motive for the *Captain's* subsequent scheme of revenge, and, though in complete disregard of *Joe's* later conduct, a bid for sympathy for the young man. When his wife has interposed between him and the giant *Captain's* fist, and the guests have departed hastily after such a painful scene, *Joe* is in a perfectly natural rebellious mood, ready for anything. He and *Emma* are invited to a theater party. They cannot go because she has no clothes fit to wear in company with her former friends. He resolves on a theater party of his own, and hang the expense. *Emma* runs to get ready. He takes a bill from the drawer where he had placed his late afternoon collections for the company. *Emma* returns, beaming. They turn out all the lights in the flat to save expense and go out. The curtain descends on a dark stage. It is an opening act of extraordinary excellencé, with the farcical mother-in-law as the one weak spot. Surely she could sting *Joe's* pride by her intimations that her daughter had made a bad match in a less exaggerated manner. It is an act that is vital with a truthful observation of existing conditions, that sets forth the leading characters of the play with

salient strokes, that naturally and swiftly prepares the spectator for the coming drama and rouses his curiosity. *Joe* does not steal to make a play. He steals because logical circumstance drove him to it. The play is going to be, you are confident, the outcome of the characters, not the characters of the play. *Pinero* himself need not have been ashamed of this act.

Before the second act some months have elapsed. *Joe* and *Emma* are seen living in a "semi-fashionable" hotel, where the wall-paper and the furniture don't match. But there is a telephone instead of a speaking-tube, and an upright piano. *Emma* is elaborately gowned. Her hands are no longer red from dish-washing. She has the kitten qualities of her sex — she purrs when surrounded with luxury. She thinks that *Joe* has had his salary trebled, with six months of back pay as well. But *Joe's* temper has n't improved. He has become impossible. There is no vestige of the gentleman left. Either his thefts have utterly ruined him or the sympathy he gained at first was gained under false pretenses. The *Captain* and *James*, it seems, have been away in South America, the *Captain*, of course, wishing to give *Joe* enough rope to hang himself with. But they come back, and faithful *James* tells *Joe* that the *Captain* knows all. The *Captain* calls and plays with *Joe* before his un-

ACT
ONE



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suspecting wife with deliberate, sly, wolfish cruelty. There is dramatic stuff in this scene; it bites. *Joe* is shadowed by detectives. He cannot escape. The *Captain* goes out, telling him to be at the office at eight the next morning. And then *Joe* confesses everything to his wife. He exposes layer after layer of abominable caddishness. He says he stole for her sake, which is more than half true, or would have been true did he not say it in such a brutal, unloving way. At length, in his cowardly fear of jail, he is driven to suggest that she go at once to *Captain Williams's* flat and intercede for him. "The *Captain* likes you — he likes pretty women," *Joe* says. "And all women know how far they can go." And he adds that she ought to do it since it was she who drove him into crime. Well, with that speech every last spark of sympathy for *Joe*, every last mite of interest in him as a type to be studied for light on social conditions, vanishes. On the opening night there was a smothered gasp almost of horror in the audience. For a moment it seemed as if the entire structure of the play was tottering, so violently were the sensibilities wrenched and the interest shifted. So *Joe* was nothing but a skunk after all! Nay, worse, he was nothing but a conventional stage villain used to bring about a third-act situation! So a play that started

in hopefully as a social study was to be in the end nothing but the fulmination of a young dramatist trying to write a "strong scene"! It was not pity for *Emma*, but sorrow for another play gone wrong, that saddened the hearts of some in the audience. Mr. Walter had his chance — and he missed it.

But in missing it he found something else of positive value, and in his third act, by the sheer dramatic life of his situation, he saved his play from the commonplace, perhaps from what would have been popular failure, even if he did have to tear a leaf out of Maeterlinck's "Mona Vanna" to do it. } For *Emma* goes to *Captain Williams's* flat, a curious place with a wheel over the door, a capstan for a table, and port and starboard lights agleam, like a Fourth Avenue drug store, and there the old sea wolf fools her and the audience alike by disclosing an elementary streak of iron generosity in his nature, a coarse kind of chivalry, that is perhaps none the less pleasant to contemplate because it results more than half from a desire for a picturesque and surprising form of revenge. "They say I'm a brute, do they? Well, I'll show 'em that — I ain't!" was the formula of the *Captain's* psychology. After all, as Frank Sheridan played him, there is something deliciously probable about this psychology. It may well be that the *Captain* is the

most intricately human character in the play. And one the more regrets that Mr. Walter had so completely to sacrifice *Joe* in order to make this evident. There is a cruel waste of good material in such construction. Of course after the earlier revelation there was but one end possible when *Emma* returned to the "semi-fashionable" hotel. She left *Joe* forever — and for the faithful *James*. Everything comes to him who waits.

The failure of the play, then, is not a failure to arouse interest in dramatic situations, nor a failure to attract public patronage. It is a failure at exactly the point where so many well-meaning and seriously written plays fail — a failure to bend the stubborn material of the stage always and consistently to the purposes of significant truth, allowing instead the material to warp the significant truth. It may be true that such skunks as *Joe* exist and manage to marry chaste and lovely *in spite of the counter proposals of faithful and adoring *Jameses*. But it is not significant, it is not representative. No light is shed on the dark places of any considerable number of Harlem flats; there is no lesson to be learned, no real comment made on present social conditions. "Paid in Full" is not, after all, a "criticism of life," but simply another play. It is an interesting, a promising play. But it is not what it should be.*

what it might have been. Judged by the exacting standards, not of Broadway but the leading examples of the modern social drama, it is a failure.

In a general way of course all these things discussed are comprised by the term "dramatic style." Dramatic style lies quite as much in the structure, in the unification of atmosphere and mood, in the development of character, as in the mere dialogue. The farcical mother-in-law in "Paid in Full" is, for example, an error of style, a kind of dramatic split infinitive! But in a narrower sense the term may be used to describe the language in which a play is couched and which when nicely handled may be potent for effect or charm even in the most realistic of plays. It is in this sense at least that Mr. Walter may be said to be lacking in style. He has much to learn and some things to unlearn. Contrast for a moment the nervous, beautiful prose of "The Great Divide" with the language of Mr. Walter's play. It can hardly be urged that *Ruth* and *Steve* do not speak human language, even if on occasion they do strike out similes worthy of Shelley. Or contrast his dialogue with that in "The Witching Hour," the work of a man who is n't, as Mr. Moody is, a student and teacher of rhetoric, and a poet as well. Mr. Thomas's characters, though they speak in character, though the

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Judge uses a different vocabulary from the gambler, do not for that reason necessarily speak harshly, without distinction. It is a nice problem, no doubt, that faces any writer of dialogue to draw the line exactly right between a realistic reproduction of conversational sloppiness and a scrupulous rhetoric. Yet he must always remember that a part of the pleasure to be derived from a work of art is an æsthetic pleasure, and the mere reproduction of conversational sloppiness will in the end bring weariness and a sense of vulgar commonplaceness. Mr. Walter has displayed in "Paid in Full" no care whatever for beauty or distinction of speech. His language is bald and commonplace. And his play suffers thereby, is not without a taint of cheapness.

But in the speeches assigned to the faithful *James* he has erred still further. In his desire to avoid bookishness, to suggest the breezy, slangy freshness of this Colorado *Cayley Drummle*, this sentimentally lovable fellow, at once so simple and so sharp, *James* talks like a book all the time — a book of slang. *James* has a peculiar, a picturesque vocabulary. He talks in metaphors, the racy metaphors of the street or the West. His vocabulary is a part of his charm and of his character. But he is a man of deep and sincere feeling, of tender sensibilities and gentle instincts. When, therefore,

he describes to the woman he loves the shame of his mother who bore him nameless into the world and died of her grief, the slang would in reality have fallen from him and he would have spoken in simple, touching English. There would have been no laughs from the audience during his narrative had he so spoken. Mr. Walter, however, has increased rather than diminished the quantity of his slang during this scene, has even more highly colored his metaphors. So the speech is false to character, it strikes harshly and painfully on the ear. And it smells of the lamp quite as much as any bombastic rhetoric could.

After all, style in the drama, as anywhere else, is the outer manifestation of an inner sense of fitness. If a character is perfectly realized, the author cannot but make him speak fitting words and do fitting things. If the dominant mood or purpose of a play is thoroughly and firmly laid hold of, the author cannot but reject all persons and episodes that are not in harmony, that shatter his mood or distract him from his purpose. Perfectly to realize all characters, firmly and thoroughly to lay hold of a dominant mood and purpose, is a task that only the exceptional authors of this earth can accomplish, least of all dramatic authors, for whom the material is so stubborn, the distracting temptations so many and great. If Mr. Walter is wise, he will learn

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many lessons from "Paid in Full" and keep an even more exacting watch on himself. It should be his ambition to be one of these exceptional authors.

ETING
In the acting, "Paid in Full" has been a shining example of the merely commercial value of good stage management. Without a star in the cast, each part told at its true worth, and all the players worked together for the play. Yet Tully Marshall as *Joseph Brooks* stood out in the cast by virtue of his performance. *Joe* is a thankless rôle from the actor's point of view, because he becomes utterly a cad and loses all sympathy of the audience. Mr. Marshall, however, was not concerned; he set to work to discover exactly what external forces brought out the latent caddishness and abominable qualities in this weak-willed youth and then showed their workings with vivid naturalness. Mr. Marshall here was superior to his author. Mr. Walter, you feel, made *Brooks* abominable largely because that was the easiest way to bring about his third-act situation. Mr. Marshall, taking *Brooks* rather as a specific human being than a pawn in the plot, extracted every bit of logical cause from circumstance and kept *Brooks* human in spite of his author. He never seemed to play for the story at all; always he played to explain, to make real, the character of *Brooks*. He was not playing a part; he was

tracking down life. It was a fine piece of acting, disclosing just the kind of intelligence and skill to make vital and moving the modern drama of contemporary life, the drama that has a purpose above the mere trickle of a story, the rehashing of conventional situations — that is searching for truth.



PARNASSUS VS. THE PUBLIC

(LYRIC, October 21, 1907)

*at Lyric
see + poster*

I DO not see," cries Mr. Arthur Symons, "why people should ever break silence upon the stage except to speak poetry."

Perhaps his answer was to be found at the Lyric Theater, where the players in Mr. MacKaye's "Sappho and Phaon." broke the silence to no effect and to small audiences, for one week only. Mr. Symons admits, he says, of nothing on the stage between pantomime and the poetic drama; all the rest is mere photograph, useless, barren. While there are few people who will go with him to this extent of fanatic appreciation, there are plenty who will share with him a belief in the vast superiority of the poetic drama, if not of the pantomime, over the prose record of life on the stage; who will hail any attempt to write a drama in verse at any time as supremely to be encouraged. Is it supremely to be encouraged? Is the poetic drama — that is, the drama in verse — essentially, inevitably, superior? In the new Twentieth Century is the drama in verse necessarily more poetic in its final effect than the naturalistic play in prose

*VERSE
DRAMA*

wrought by a man of insight and imagination? To be specific, could not Percy MacKaye better serve himself and the American Stage by writing dramas of to-day, in the idiom of to-day, by deserting Pegasus for a motor car?

This tight old world is in very little danger from revolutionists, iconoclasts, new ideas in any form. We are compact of an inherited stock of beliefs and ideas, and we adopt as little that is new as possible; we hate a change, a readjustment. We get along with the old just as long as we can, and when a change is inevitable we welcome just as little of the new as our consciences or our comfort will allow. In no department of our ideas is this more true than in our ideas about the drama. Old traditions flourish just because they are traditions; old conventions, moldy with time, still prevail and are accepted by audiences long after every one knows they are false and hollow. The stage villain, the stage servant, the stage hero, what are they but conventions we lack the initiative to give up? And one of the most deep-rooted of our traditional beliefs about the theater is the belief that the blank-verse drama is inevitably the noblest form, by divine right king. And so each time that a new drama in blank verse is written we heave a pious ejaculation of approval, we fill up our critical fountain pens to praise, if possible, or if we are not critics

but just "patrons of the theater," we hasten to buy seats. And then we all go to the theater and are solemnly bored, and between acts quote to each other the familiar bromide: "The trouble is there are no actors any longer who know how to read blank verse!" It does not occur to us to admit — nor would we admit it if it did — that perhaps the poetic drama fails to interest us for quite another reason, because it is no longer a living form, because whether we like and approve it or not, the old order does change. And sooner or later it will compel our reluctant admission.

Now, nobody is going to deny that the dear bromide about actors and blank verse is true, save in the honorable case of Julia Marlowe. Fred Eric alone of the entire "Sappho and Phaon" company (and he was trained by Miss Marlowe) could get his lines across the foot-lights as verse, even could speak them in excited moments so that the words were intelligible above the sound of the property surf, which so perilously suggested the arrival of the winter coal supply. The star herself, Mme. Bertha Kalisch, was the worst offender. But in the name of common sense, why can't our actors read blank verse? Who is to blame? We are, the spirit of the age is, the evolution of the drama is; and could anything be more illogical, if not actually hypocritical, than our melan-

choly lamentations over a corpse of something which we ourselves have killed actually without regret in the cause of entertainment? If our actors cannot speak blank verse, it is because they have not been trained by practice to speak it, and that is because the blank verse drama has not been played; and if the blank verse drama has not been played, that is because the public does not want it. What we consciously approve from motives of supposed propriety we unconsciously disapprove from instinct. Of course, our instincts carry the day; they always do. And we present the melancholy spectacle, so hateful to Ibsen, of men and women who dare not come right out into the open for their instincts. We are in much the same position as the good deacon whom Professor Pratt describes in his book on "The Psychology of Religious Belief." "The time is coming," said the deacon, sadly, "when I shall have to believe what I believe!"

Yet it is not such a terrible thing to believe what you believe. It is like taking a cold plunge in the morning. The preliminary fear is awful, the after effect a glowing reaction. So the man who finally admits honestly to himself that the modern naturalistic drama interests him tremendously and the blank verse drama seems to him archaic, outworn, false, a thing now for the closet, not the stage, clears himself "of past

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regrets and future fears" and is filled with a certain bounding exhilaration and faith in the present. He is like the rich man who lost all his money in the Civil War and rolled on the ground in sheer delight of feeling free again. What your theater-goer has lost is the load of tradition, the burden of the past, an inherited pessimism; what he has gained is freedom to trust the present and hope for the future. And his gain is so great that it is quite worth the chance even of being wrong. *Crede experto.*

But there are arguments in plenty to buttress his position, aside from this greatest one, the freedom to trust in the present tendencies of the stage, the greatest because faith in one's own generation is always the finest incentive to good and significant work. [The drift of art has always been toward specialization. Modern criticism has busied itself with searching out and analyzing the peculiar qualities of the poem, the novel, the picture, the statue, the play. If a novel could just as well be a play or an epic a novel, modern criticism tells us that novel or that epic is a bad piece of art. But the drama has long been a jumble of the arts, only feeling its way up gradually and realizing imperfectly a sure and distinct ideal of its own. As the "apron" of Shakespeare's stage gradually shrank further and further back till now it has disappeared, the players being entirely

framed behind the proscenium arch, the "room with the fourth wall removed" being fully realized, this ideal has emerged more and more clearly. The growth of scenery has done away with the need of language to describe the scene. Electric lights and the thousand mechanical aids to illusion have done away with the demand for pictorial description in the play. A slow growth of technique has eliminated the soliloquy, boiled down and concentrated the action, made the scene within the proscenium frame so much more natural, so much more like life, that to our modern ears nothing but lifelike speech will be tolerated from the players, and unconsciously we have come to demand that it shall still further fulfill the demands of naturalism and be speech couched in prose. If the old-time spouting actor is dead, the old-time blank verse spouted is archaic. The drama has, in short, become a highly specialized art form, its ideal being to recreate reality as surely, as vividly, as directly as possible. To that end it divorces poetic speech as a convention false to life, as it has divorced the false exaggerations of the actors.

Nor is this at all to say that the modern drama is only a photograph, or even that it cannot be in a larger sense poetic. One of the great achievements of the Nineteenth Century was to strike the fetters from prose. Wordsworth

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dismissed the old Eighteenth Century distinction between prose and verse by declaring the difference to rest upon the almost technical basis of the absence or presence of metrical beauty. That distinction glorifies the prose drama. Newman and Ruskin and Arnold and Pater have taught us that prose may carry its burden of loveliness no less than verse, may have its own cadences and melody. It was Pater who said that music is the ideal art because it is impossible in music to distinguish the form from the substance or matter, the subject from the expression. Now the poetic drama is a divorce of the form and the subject matter in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, so seldom is the subject matter sufficiently unworldly, glorified, saturated with mystic or musical feeling as to comport naturally with verse in the mouths of the characters. The content, the subject matter of the drama to-day, is not a thing apart from life; it is a section of life where prose is spoken, and a perfect welding of form and substance demands that prose be the form. That this welding can be accomplished without loss of beauty in the mere speech "The Great Divide" sufficiently attests, a play in which the spoken words at once fulfill the ideal of the modern naturalistic stage and the ideal of imaginative charm and verbal cadence. And that the modern prose drama

need not be and is not a mere photograph the works of Ibsen and every playwright who has wrought from the idea, who has had a "criticism of life" to make, abundantly prove. Life may still be treated poetically, life may still be glorified on the stage. Only now it must be glorified not by being made something different from life, something apart and unreal, but something first of all like life, a piece of it, set out truthfully and considered for what may be there over and above the more obvious aspects. It is not the poetry in the blank verse drama which we find, in our hearts, uninteresting; it is the unreality. We are no more literal-minded than our fathers were. But we have been taught by the evolution of the stage, by the specialization of the drama, the divorce between the art of playwriting and the art of verse making, to look for one quality of emotion from the one art, and another quality from the other. We are but following the inevitable march of things and events. Why then should we be ashamed?

Let us not be ashamed! Let us go right on enjoying "A Grand Army Man" more than "Sappho and Phaon" and not tell ourselves we should n't. Let us say right out that Percy MacKaye, a young American of high ideals, steadfast adherence to his best beliefs, courage, intelligence, fine taste and imaginative quality,

could far better serve our stage and his own ideals by giving us dramas of our own day in our modern idiom. Let us not mind the scholastic people, "praisers of what is old and accustomed at the expense of what is new; who would never have discovered for themselves the charm of any work, whether new or old, who value what is old in art or literature . . . for the conventional authority that has gathered about it." Let us not think that all verse is poetry — much of Mr. MacKaye's is n't — or all prose unpoetic. Let us not fancy that what we don't like is good for us and what we do like is therefore bad!

It would be a pretty problem for some student of æsthetics to figure out what share the growth of the music drama in the past seventy-five or one hundred years has had upon the decline of the drama in verse. The opera, especially in New York, is enormously patronized. And the tragic opera is especially popular, just as the poetic tragedy used to lord it in interest over the lighter forms of verse plays. Once upon a time music was the spokesman of the lighter moods, and the stage looked after the grand passions. Now there is hardly a grand passion once set down in heroic verse and mouthed by our Garricks and Keans and Forrests that is not sung in opera over the sobbing, wailing, crashing harmonies of strings and wood wind

INFLUENCE
OF MUSIC
DRAMA
ON DECLINE
OF VERSE
DRAMA

and ringing brass.] How tame seemed Mr. MacKaye's love scene between *Sappho* and *Phaon* to any one whose ears carried the memory of the duet from the second act of "Tristan and Isolde"! And when his fisher folk entered, singing their hymn to Poseidon, — a hymn, by the way, of great effectiveness and charm, as was all Professor Stanley's music for the play, — did it not seem as if the play had at last reached its true medium, becoming opera? In the poetic drama at its best there resides a haunting unreality, a moonlit potency over the primal emotions, the vague places of the heart, closely akin to the eloquence of music. The music of the verse indeed is but a kind of aria. This is very far from the semi-intellectual appeal of the drama as we know it to-day; but it is correspondingly close to modern opera, even to opera since Glück. Perhaps what "Sappho and Phaon" tries to do Wagner achieves. Perhaps the release of the human spirit through the biological emotions (there is really no other adjective) once accomplished by the poetic drama is now accomplished by opera. It is a pretty question, and one by no means lightly to be dismissed.

But for some time now the reader has been either scornfully tolerant or wriggling with indignation. Perhaps at last he explodes the word "Shakespeare" like a bombshell. Really

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that is not fair, because it has been so, these many generations since Shakespeare made his appeal solely as a dramatist. When revivals of his work warm the Winter of our discontent, no small portion of the audiences is drawn from a class which does not as a rule frequent the playhouse, and, for the rest of us his characters are so familiar and fraught with past associations and even with childhood dreams, his dramas so much a part of our education and our English inheritance, that he is no fair test. Shakespeare as exception proves more than one rule. His genius triumphs over his gross absurdities of plot; his poetry lifts play and players and beholder into its own exalted and lonely regions, where no one but he has trod. Rather try Beaumont and Fletcher on Broadway, and see how long one of their plays would run, how much interest it would awake, to judge the Elizabethan poetic drama on its fitness as a class, a genre, for the modern stage. Has the reader any doubts of the result? What Eighteenth Century verse drama would he care to revive? Addison's "Cato"? Or perchance "Douglas," which at its first performance inspired the excited Scotchman to cry out, "Where's your Willie Shakespeare noo?" We know the dramas of the early Nineteenth Century poets, great as poetry, were bad as stage pieces, and we have recently seen at the

very theater where "Sappho and Phaon" was exhibited the melancholy failure of "Virgin-ius," which, atrocious "poetry" as it is, was once effective in the acting. Not long ago we saw the failure of Stephen Phillip's modern "Ulysses," and a year later the cool reception of his "Paolo and Francesca," which had been hailed, between covers, as works of a high order of merit. And now "Sappho and Phaon" is the latest sacrifice on the cruel altar of Tradition, the latest costly offering of money and thought and energy. Does it not seem futile? Does it not seem foolish? Does it not seem too wasteful to be encouraged?

There is a young poet in New York who says some day he is going to write a play in mixed prose and verse about modern life. His scenes will be laid right here and now in America; his characters will wear the conventional garb of the age. The exposition will be in prose, but when the emotions mount, when the play swings into its climaxes, he will show, declares this poet, that verse is still your only form of speech, that poetry has not perished from the world. Noble ambition! And may he find a manager to produce his play and actors who can speak his lines! If he is a poet by divine right, no doubt he can shatter all theories, sweep everything before him. If he, unlike

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Mr. MacKaye, can achieve the music and simplicity and heart-searching eloquence of such poetry as these lines of Milton telling of the loss of Proserpine —

“ . . . which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world ” —

and if he can also write a play which otherwise fulfills the modern requirements of technical skill and faithful portrayal of life and character, well, the crown and sceptre are his! But while we are waiting for him to write this play, let us not worry too much over our low estate. Let us not be too sure that because the blank verse drama does not flourish, poetry has therefore perished from the earth. Let us remind ourselves now and then that if Pinero could n't write “An Ode to a Nightingale,” neither could Keats have written “Iris.” Let us try to see in the loss of verse from the drama a compensating vividness of reality, as though the stage had crept closer to life and could now help us where before it only comforted with delusions. And, above all, let us try to see that poetry does not reside alone in the five-foot iambic line or in any metrical combination of words; that common things ennobled, that hearts touched with pity or warmed by love, that sacrifice and birth and death may all become poetry if a ray of truth shine suddenly

upon them so that they stand out like images for us to see and wonder at.

When *Hilda* exclaims, "My Kingdom, Master Builder, my Kingdom on the table!" the words carry a world of suggestion that make them more truly poetry than anything, perhaps, in "Sappho and Phaon." And the humble sitting room of *Wes' Bigelow's* house, sleeping in the warm sunlight to the drowsy tick of the clock, has the quality of Whittier's domestic verse about it no less sure and potent than "Snow Bound" itself. No playwright need be less a poet for working in the medium effective with a modern audience — indeed, whether he approves or not, practically demanded by the modern audience. And, by yielding to his times, he can surely accomplish far more practical good. Trying to dam the stream of tendency with a drama in blank verse may be heroic, but it is not economical. The stream flows on.

RHYME AND UNREASON

(EMPIRE, January 15, 1908)

WITH all due respect and admiration for Miss Maude Adams, with all due respect and admiration for the drama "made in France" (a trade-mark supposed to carry all the weight of the English "sterling"), with all due — well, with all due consideration of the applause bestowed upon play and players, it is impossible to take "The Jesters" very seriously. Putting aside for a moment the question of metrical form, the content and spirit of this play are spurious, and greatly to admire it, even greatly to derive pleasure from it, is to confuse the real with what is only imitation; to confuse, if not actually to debase, one's standards of taste and judgment; certainly to entangle one's merely friendly interest in the personality of Miss Adams with one's æsthetic appreciation of a work of art. Such a confusion of judgments is not, unfortunately, rare or difficult to fall into, and therein lies one of the greatest dangers of the "star" system. The apparently considerable public approval of "The Jesters" is an excellent case in point.

For the metrical form of the English version ought alone to condemn it. The rhymed Alexandrines of the French drama in verse have been accepted in France as the ideal poetic form for so many generations that they have acquired a dignity of tradition no less powerful than the English tradition of blank verse, the five-foot iambic line, unrhymed. There is a very simple reason for this — the lack of accent in the French language. To the English or the German ear, in fact, the French tongue seems often unfitted for verse forms at all, and the tripping flow of the Alexandrine couplet can never, to such ears, rise to the dignity, the eloquence, the poetic suggestion either of the Miltonic line or even the rapid, staccato beat of the four-foot iambic, the meter of Scott. But when a trained French actor — and most French actors are trained in elocution as a singer is trained in colorature — tosses off these Alexandrines, they do achieve an effect quite different from prose, musical, romantic. However, the very fact which justifies them as a verse form in French completely condemns them as a verse form in English. This is by now such an accepted cant of criticism that it seems almost absurd to have to repeat it. The lack of accent in French justifies the iambic hexameter. The presence of accent in English, the existence of accent at the very basis of Eng-

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lish versification, makes the iambic hexameter, especially when rhymed, about the most monotonous, artificial, inhuman verse form that could possibly be chosen. It is only fair to state the report that neither Miss Adams nor Mr. Frohman was responsible for this choice, it being thrust upon them by M. Zamacois, the French author of the play, who must be virginally ignorant of English literature, as only an educated Parisian can be. But, after all, the critic is n't greatly concerned with whose fault the choice may be. The choice was made, and he has to consider the result.

Matters were not mended any by John Raphael, who undertook the task of making the translation into the barbaric Alexandrines. Not only is his translation so commonplace in diction that one wonders why he is n't better known, — poet laureate, perhaps, — but in style it is often little more than the versification of a schoolboy turning Ovid into English. Frantic inversions of sentences occur to bring about a rhyme; words are dragged in by the heels, poor, little, honest, plodding, prosy words, for the same purpose; often the rhymes are quite unsanctioned by any law of poetic usage, even by the Brownings; and as for the ring and tramp of dramatic verse, the eloquence of imaginative phraseology, the magic of the poet, none of these things is here. One

feels pretty sure, too, that they would n't be here even were the Alexandrines absent, even if a more suitable meter had been chosen. Somebody once unjustly remarked that a translated poem is a boiled strawberry, unjustly, because T. E. Brown's translations, for example, prove well enough that the trick can be done, especially if the original has something real to say. But it takes a poet to do it. Mr. Raphael is n't a poet. So when the audience goes into raptures over Miss Adams's very pretty recitation of the sentimental passage about the breeze,

"Le souffle qui remue imperceptiblement
Cette jeune glycine au tour du vieux sarment,"

and so on, their raptures, if they have any real taste in poetry, any real judgment of what is and what is not good verse, are wholly due to their pleasure in seeing Miss Adams prettily posed in a *tableau vivant*, and their pleasure in hearing her small, sympathetic voice tackling this interminable tale. Just because a speech happens to be in rhyme, just because it has to do with these ladylike accessories of the poets, "gentle zephyrs" and sighing maidens and perfumes and broken hearts, it is not necessarily poetry, even if in some simple bosoms that gentle delusion does prevail. And if it is not poetry, if it has not caught the

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magic utterance, if the lips of it have not been touched with the coal from the high altar, to listen to its poor, sentimental masquerade is far less pleasant and profitable than to listen to simple, honest prose, which by its mere simplicity can often come far closer to real poetry than this spurious rhyme stuff ever can.

Since we are on the subject of verse, it will do nobody any harm to turn to his Shakespeare. Read from the last act of "The Merchant of Venice":

The moon shines bright. In such a night as this
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees,
And they did make no noise, — in such a night
Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls —

. . . In such a night
Did Thisbe fearfully o'ertrip the dew —

. . . In such a night
Stood Dido, with a willow in her hand,
Upon the wild sea-banks, and waved her love
To come again to Carthage.

Here is the very soul and the magic of poetry, as Arnold pointed out in one of his essays, that transcendent quality lurking in the language, one knows not how, to subdue the brain of the reader, to kindle his imagination, to transport and to expand him. Go to "The Jesters" with those last lines in your memory, three of the most transcendent lines in English poetry, that only Keats has equaled, for

it is only possible rightly to estimate verse by the touchstone of the best examples — go with those lines as a touchstone and see what magic you can find in “The Jesters,” what “poetry” anywhere worthy of that high title. There is none; it is metrical joiner’s work, and clumsy work at that, nothing more. It deserves no consideration as literature; as an example of literary or poetic drama, merits no enthusiasm. But a line of proof is worth more than pages of assertion. Here are several lines, as many as I have the heart to afflict, of *Chicot’s* lengthy tale about the breeze. The second line quoted is especially “a favorite of mine,” though I must confess a certain fondness also for the sixteenth, with its reminiscence of Heine, and the incomparable thirteenth, suggestive at first of “The Wreck of the Hesperus,” but speedily developing into originality. “Blue were her eyes” is good; but so were the eyes of the skipper’s little daughter. However, they were “soft as the young sky at dawn” (which, by the way, is pink), while the skipper’s daughter’s were merely likened to fairy flax. But enough of comment. The Alexandrines shall speak for themselves. Here they are:

The gentle breeze which stirs the leaves of yonder vine
 Recalls to me a tale, a favorite of mine,
 A story which one day in an old book I found,
 An ancient tome, gaunt, grim, black-lettered, leather-bound,

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Which tome, looking as though 't were filled with tales of sin,
Promised but little of the charm I found within.
'T was in this book I read the tale, which, if you please,
I will repeat to-night — "The Story of the Breeze."
A breeze one day, abroad on fun or mischief bent,
Entered a castle grim, traversed the battlement,
And on the terrace found, sitting and spinning there,
A maiden of sixteen, blue eyed, with golden hair.
Blue were her eyes and soft as the young sky at dawn,
Or the waves of the lake the breeze had crossed that morn,
And as the intruder loosed a strand of golden hair
The maid looked up and laughed, so sweet, so chaste, so fair,
That the breeze, who till then had kissed and whirled away,
Over the trees and far, fickle until to-day,
Knew that this time his heart was bound and tethered there
To that child of sixteen, blue eyed, with golden hair,
For the fair maid had won, won all unconsciously,
A lover without name and whom she could not see,
While the breeze loved to love, and for no royal throne
Would have exchanged his right to love her thus unknown.

Well — it rhymes.

But if "The Jesters" had anything whatever of value to say over and above its form there might be some reason for excusing the clumsy translation. Unless memory is at fault the translation of "Cyrano" played here was none too good in form, not so good, certainly, as Miss Gertrude Hall's prose version. But "Cyrano" had many things to say that were of value, even if said with less than their original poetic grace. "Cyrano" had vitals. Its swashbucklings and its romantic posturings

never lost a certain hold on reality, were capable at any moment of pathos, of dramatic seriousness. Moreover, its wit was wit; it did not merely call itself such. Its humor arose from the characters, not, as in "The Jesters," from the land of opera bouffe. Its men were men, its women women; and if their emotions were somewhat superlyric, at least they were never neuter!

But "The Jesters" has absolutely nothing whatever to say that has not already been said again and again, mostly better said, and mostly, for that matter, in "Cyrano." The play was originally produced by Sarah Bernhardt, and probably it was written for her. It is n't the first play that Sarah has disported herself in that had nothing to say, but it is one of a few that we remember which says nothing so tamely. Most of the others at least made a noise! The central idea of the piece, that of a Prince Charming disguised as a grotesque jester in order to court his lady love, might, indeed, conceivably yield to a resourceful playwright and to an actor like Coquelin or Mansfield considerable fun and a real situation or two. But, though we are told that *Jacasse* (or *Chicot*, as Miss Adams prefers to be called, fearing, no doubt, that a phonetic pronunciation would be accepted by her audiences in lieu of a translation!) worsts all his opponents in

a jesting tournament, his victory is about as convincing as that of the young woman over the millionaire in "The Lion and the Mouse." Just as there the real effect was one of pity for the thick wits of the millionaire, so here one chiefly scorns the other jesters instead of admiring *Jacasse* (pardon, *Chicot*). And, of course, the presence of a woman in the rôle is utterly destructive of any illusion during the so-called "love scenes." Boys may have played *Juliet* in Shakespeare's day, but girls cannot play *Romeo* now, unless they do it, as *Ann* did in "Man and Superman," by a complete reversal of the sexes.

The gifted and golden Sarah, having long ago conquered all the female rôles within her horizon (which is not so wide perhaps as the world), Alexander-like, sighed for new rôles to conquer, and played *Hamlet* and *L'Aiglon*, and now in her declining years, just to show how little time has touched her, this rôle of the youthful Prince Charming. It must have been a perfect pickle for her, with its bravura passages of rapid fire lyrics, its long-winded speech about the breeze, its hump, its sword-play, its love-making (Sarah pleading passionately as she planned an additional chapter for her autobiography), its infantile romanticism and its half-baked emotions. One imagines her smiling to herself as she walked through

this part, yet smiling a little wistfully, for the dead days when it was not needful to let her energies trickle through such tiny channels. And one imagines Paris, well aware of the wistfulness of the smile, watching, applauding, no less kind to its old favorite than New York is to its young one. Yet did Paris take it all quite seriously, was it unaware of the other corner of the smile? It seems incredible.

Well, as with the little *L'Aiglon*, Miss Adams has once more assumed a male rôle laid down by Sarah the Grand. She has rushed in where angles fear to tread. And nobody could look more charming and graceful in those frank masculine garments than she. Indeed she looks altogether too charming. As the grotesque jester, her hump alone is grotesque, and that is almost invisible. Any genuine effort to make the disguise stand out by contrast, any willingness on her part to sacrifice her personal charm for the demands of the play, is lacking. The demands, to be sure, are slight enough; it is no *Rigoletto* that she is called upon to impersonate, even in jest. If it were she could not do it. It is not lack of ability; it is lack either of understanding or of willingness to let her art stand higher than the easy appeal to the personal affections of a simple-minded public. The creation of illusion in a love passage is beyond her power as it is be-

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yond that of any other woman player in a man's rôle; and for this reason alone "The Jesters" could never have more than a success of curiosity.

But a little something more than the simpering romance, the tame prettiness of the play as it is given here is possible. And that something is not lost through the clumsiness of Miss Adams's supporting company, which in most cases is considerable. It is lost through Miss Adams's own failure to forego the pretty and the romantic (I blush every time I am obliged to use that excellent word in connection with this play) and make herself externally unattractive and grotesque, perhaps in voice and manner as well as form and garb, in order to win what dramatic contrast and what faint echo of real romance the play might contain. Now, when Miss Adams takes the center of the stage, radiating that peculiar, elfin charm that has so endeared her to the public, looking as lovely as a picture, as graceful as a sylph, and recites her speech about the breeze, one thinks awhile of ugly old Cyrano and his speech below the balcony, and then, more and more, of Kipling's poem, till finally the devil whispers behind the scenes, "It's pretty, but is it art?"

SOPHOCLES IN THE BACK YARD

(GARDEN, February 11, 1908)

OF the hundred or more dramas of Sophocles only seven have been preserved for us in their entirety. The rest, if they survive at all, survive only in precious fragments. One of these fragments is the stately line:

For ever fairly fall the dice of Jove,

known in the epigram, "The dice of Jove are always loaded."

Another is part of a chorus:

The looms adamantine
Of Destiny weave
All sorts of devices
Men's souls to deceive;
They cannot be measured,
They cannot be fled;
[They wait by his threshold,
They wait by his bed.]

These fragments indicate with the brevity of the Athenian poets that belief in Nemesis so characteristic of their dramas, that sense of

fate which criticism never fails to mention. Criticism does not always adequately, even correctly, account for it, however. The Greeks, certainly the Greeks of the age of Pericles, were not fatalists. Fatalism belongs to a later period, and "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die" was a doctrine of life that Sophocles would have repudiated with lofty scorn. Their belief in fate was rather a religious faith, a trust in the moral order, in a guiding power beyond and behind all their pantheistic doctrines, their legendary religions. So if the sins of the fathers were visited on the children, as seemed so often the case in Greek history, they accounted for it by the justice of all powerful Jove. It was not a doctrine of inherited sin either. It was no Christian dogma of man's fall. The sins of the father brought suffering on the children, but did not make them sinful too. There was something profoundly pitiful in this affliction of the innocents to the Greek mind, but nothing hopeless, nothing that demanded an elaborate scheme of salvation. Eventually the balance of justice swung to even beam. *Electra* was revenged and *Orestes* purged of the crime of matricide. Not to realize this philosophical basis of Greek tragedy, not to realize that the highly specialized and critical Athenian audiences of the time of Pericles regarded the

performance of tragic drama almost as a religious rite, recalling as they must have done that actually within the memories of their fathers it had been solely a religious rite and not drama at all, — a lyric performance made up of song, ritual, and the dance, — is to miss the spirit of Greek tragedy entirely. And not to detect in the rhetoric, the language, of such a poet as Sophocles, even in translation, a chaste restraint and nobility of utterance that has the effect, even apart from the underlying thought, of idealizing and making dignified the most bloody and sordid of incidents, is to fail in critical insight.

It is only when the spirit of Greek tragedy is missed, its language and restraint uncomprehended, its lyricism and ritualistic origin forgotten, that the "Electra" of Hugo von Hofmannstahl can be judged as in any way representative of the "Electra" of Sophocles. Indeed were it even an attempt at reproducing Sophocles, it would be entitled only to the most scathing condemnation as a weak and feeble replica of an original that should be sacred. But it is not such an attempt. It is an attempt to make something new and different, with the story of "Electra" as a starting-point. It no more pretends to be Sophocles than Wilde's "Salome" pretends to be the Bible. Failing to grasp this fact, the spectator at

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Mrs. Campbell's production at the Garden Theatre who knew anything at all about Greek tragedy was hard put to get his bearings.

It is significant that Von Hofmannstahl has shifted the scene of "*Electra*" to the rear of the palace of *Clytemnestra*. The Greek chorus of ladies in waiting has become a crowd of servants. Von Hofmannstahl is Sophocles in the back yard! When the play opens these servants are discussing *Electra*, who, it is disclosed, is driven to live with them, clothed in rags and fed on table refuse. They speak of her as crouching in corners, as spitting at them when they taunt her. They draw a picture so far removed from the figure of Sophocles, who shone regal through her rags, that before *Electra* enters, the intelligent beholder has been prepared for quite a new and different being from the heroine of the Greek drama. To say that Mrs. Campbell when she did enter as *Electra* was not Greek is to say that negatively, at least, she played this modern drama properly.

Electra's first speech in the Greek play begins as follows:

Holy light, with Earth and Sky,
Whom thou fillest equally,
Ah, how many a note of woe,
Many a self-inflicted blow

On my scarred breast mightst thou mark,
 Ever as recedes the dark;
 Known, too, all my nightlong cheer
 To bitter bed and chamber drear,
 How I mourn my father lost.
 Whom on no barbarian coast
 Did red Ares greet amain.
 But as woodmen cleave an oak
 My mother's axe dealt murderous stroke,
 Backed by the partner of her bed,
 Fell Ægisthus, on his head;
 Whence no pity, save from me,
 O my father, flows for thee,
 So falsely, foully slain.

As the lyric speech goes on, interspersed by comments and attempts at comfort from the chorus, and more than once suggesting sources of Matthew Arnold's poetry, though *Electra* declares she is "uncomely arrayed," it is no half-crazed female talking, who would snarl like a dog at the servants. Here is only chaste restraint and nobility of language. Here are no such passages as in the new version, where *Electra* describes in detail, with a kind of perverted fury, the murder, the spattering of the blood, the dragging forth of *Agamemnon's* body by the heels; where she refers to her own enforced virginity in literal, almost physiological terms, talks of breasts empty of milk and uncaressed by baby lips; where she amplifies on the queen's dream, hinted at by

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Sophocles, drawing a frenzied picture of her imagined revenge, which not content with her mother's death includes her torture. Contrast with the language of Sophocles this speech from Arthur Symons's English version of the new play (available in book form), almost unctuously degenerate in its insistence on the details of horror. *Electra* speaks:

Where are you, father? Have you not the strength
To lift your face and look on me again?
It is the hour, father, it is our hour;
The hour when these two slaughtered you, your wife
And he who lay in the same bed with her,
Your kingly bed. They struck you in your bath,
Dead: and your blood ran over both your eyes,
And all the bed steamed with the blood; then he,
The coward, took you by your shoulders, dragged you
Out of the room, head foremost, and both legs
After it trailing; and your eyes, wide open,
Staring behind them, saw into the house. . . .
Your son Orestes and your daughters, we
These three, when all is done and there arises
Canopied purple from your streaming blood,
The sun sucks upward, then we three, your blood,
Will dance about your grave; and I will lift
Knee after knee above the heap of dead
Step by step higher, and all who see me dance,
Yea, all who see my shadow from afar
Dancing, shall say: Behold how great a king
Here holds high festival of his flesh and blood,
And happy is he about whose mighty grave
His children dance so royal a dance of triumph.

Or take this speech to *Orestes*, frankly indicative of the spirit of the play:

. . . And when
 At night before my mirror, I blew out
 The lamp, I felt, and with a maiden thrill,
 My naked body through the heavy night
 Shine, as a godly thing immaculate. . . .
 . . . Do you think if I
 Had pleasure of my body, that his sighs
 Would not throng on me and his groans not throng
 About my bed? For jealous are the dead,
 And he has sent me hatred for a bridegroom,
 Hollow-eyed hatred. And that horrible thing,
 Breathing a viperous breath, had I to take
 Into my sleepless bed, that it might teach me
 All that is done between a man and wife.

The *Electra* of the Greek drama is a princess of majestic stature, an idealized character, whose soul-absorbing passion of revenge transfigures her into an instrument of destiny, whose piercing grief and torment are part of the sorrows of her line, inflicted upon her by the all-seeing gods and only to be wiped out by punishing the criminals who brought them upon the house of Agamemnon. The story of "*Electra*" is not a pretty tale; matricide is not a pleasant thing to contemplate. And it was one of the great glories of the Greek poets that they could lift such a theme into the regions of tragic sublimity by their sheer religious sin-

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cerity and nobility of mind, arousing "pity and fear," and in Aristotle's phrase, "purging the emotions." Pity and fear are not aroused by Von Hofmannstahl's play, but curiosity and horror. The emotions are not purged, but scraped, irritated, made to shiver and creep. In all probability this was the effect sought; certainly it is the effect gained. Therefore his "*Electra*" is not in any true sense a reconstruction of Greek tragedy. It is something absolutely different, entirely modern, and no doubt degenerate. However, exactly what constitutes degeneracy must be left to wiser heads to decide, to the passionately proper Max Nordau, perhaps. Personally we would not for a moment intimate that a performance of a Greek drama, with all the classic accessories and with the ancient tongue once more spoken, in the antique setting of the Harvard Stadium, is not a far more beautiful and satisfactory and uplifting thing than a performance of Von Hofmannstahl's play, even with Glück's overture for the "*Iphigenia*" (which nobody listened to). But neither would we intimate that a picture of blood lust for revenge, a portrayal of a woman crazed by the passion for physical retribution on the bodies of those who murdered her father, a psychopathic study of the fabled *Electra*, may not be fascinating, curiously alluring and in no wise necessarily

harmful so long as it is not supposed to represent anew the drama of Sophocles. This masquerading in olden garb, this neo-classic form of the modern "Electra," this simulated stride of true tragic passion, while they are perversely a part of its uncanny charm, are also its danger for the uncritical beholder. Judge it not as Greek drama, but as something modern and deliberately cruel and bloodlustful, something quite godless and sordid, not sublime, and the new "Electra" will hold for you a new sensation, a strange allurements, inspire a shiver of delicious horror, a shudder of unsanctified delight.

And it is in this spirit that Mrs. Campbell played it. A remarkably striking woman to look upon, and a remarkably effective actress in certain rôles, Mrs. Campbell has never displayed that glib virtuosity of a Bernhardt. The blank verse oration, full of sound and fury, and so often signifying nothing, it has never been hers to peal forth with quivering effect. Still less has she ever shown that she could Sardouille; the *Fedoras* and the *Toscas* are not for her. Perhaps she has too much scorn for their falsity and pyrotechnics. But give her a character that interests her, that wins her belief, and she can seize upon its salient outline with bold, firm grasp, and then fill that outline in with the minutest strokes of shading, with

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patient cross hatching, and with broad sweeps of color and shadows too. Thus she did with *Mrs. Ebbsmith*, one of the finest portraits on the contemporary stage. Thus she did with *Beata* in "Es Lebe das Leben." And thus she did with *Electra*, in Von Hofmannstahl's drama. She accepted it, she believed in it, she exerted herself on its creation, and it came to life under her touch, a sinister, terrible woman, a strange perversion of the eternal Aholibah, whose lust is the lust for blood, whose desire is toward murder and revenge. "I have kissed thy mouth, Iokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth," sings *Salome*, while the acid strings in Mr. Strauss's multitudinous orchestra are biting horribly. And *Electra's* triumph dance before the palace door says no less plainly, "I have had thy blood, Clytemnestra, I have had thy blood," while Mr. Strauss's acid strings in his operatic version will no doubt bite horribly once more. That indicates the spirit and the achievement of Mrs. Campbell's performance.

To bring this conception to the birth the sonorous delivery of the sensuous verse of Mr. Symons, after the manner of the "old school" actors of poetic tragedy, would have been out of place and ineffective. It would have been as out of place as a make-up suggesting the tragedy queens of Sir Thomas Lawrence, in-

stead of an Aubrey Beardsley drawing, which is what Mrs. Campbell actually suggested. Her method of speech was a natural reading of the verse, that let its sensuous similes tell rather than its measured roll; and her impassioned outbreaks came as a smothered fury rather than an oratorical period. There is much to be said for this method under any circumstances. Here it was the only method. For here *Electra* is not a figure of tragic dignity and noble passion, neither an instrument of destiny nor its victim. Nemesis is not here, the rushing of the wings of Fate. She is a woman sick with the lust for blood, "something curious and sensual." In her black rags and her grape-blue headgear, the naked marble of her bosom deepening the rings below her thirsty eyes and accentuating the cruel crimson of her lip line, Mrs. Campbell moved a sinister figure about the stage, a figure not of brooding misery, but malignant hate, to dig with her own hands for the hatchet when she thinks *Orestes* dead, to dance in a kind of fit of horrid joy when she has heard her mother's screams and seen the *King* dragged forth and slain, falling at last prone on the stage in a faint, worn out with the excess of passion, like some creature in a Bacchanalian orgy, some figure from the ancient pictures of the Dionysian mysteries.

Sophocles would not have recognized his *Electra* in this performance, true enough. But Sophocles would not have recognized his language or his spirit in such a speech as *Electra's* to her sister, "Swear to me, mouth upon mouth"; or his play in the abolition of the lyric choruses, or in the total subordination of the part of *Orestes*, or in the lost characterization of the sister, *Chrysothemis*, in the original so sharply contrasted in spirit with *Electra*, or in the omission of that splendid throwing open of the portals to disclose *Orestes* by his mother's corpse and his recognition by the *King*, or above all in the dance. This is not Sophocles's *Electra*. And any criticism of Mrs. Campbell because she did not rise to sweeping heights, fulfilling the conception of Greek tragic poetry, ample and large and nobly eloquent, is utterly futile and beside the point. What she did is what she should have done; she created by picture and pose and the play of passion over her wonderful face, by smothered voice and baleful outbursts, by body and by speech, a definite and unforgettable portrait of the nursed fury of revenge, of the thirst for blood, of perverted lust. It is as foolish to talk of loveliness, or dignity, or nobility in this performance, as some have done, as it is to find fault with it for lacking these qualities. It did not possess in any ordinary sense of those

words loveliness, or dignity, or nobility, and probably it did not aim to. It did exactly what it set out to do definitely, hence eloquently, and that was to portray the *Electra* of Von Hofmannstahl. Because it succeeded, it was a fine performance and needs no further defence or justification.

MR. JONES'S REVIVAL

(KNICKERBOCKER, September 30, 1907)

MR. JONES'S new play, "The Galilean's Victory" (or "The Evangelist," if that inept title must be used), seems to many people rather more a revival. And they are more than half right. It is more than a dramatized revival meeting, of course; but it is certainly that, psychologically, and even, at the close of acts three and four, in actual externals. The revivalist is seen upon the platform, the repentant sinner mounts beside him, the hymns are sung, the red banner is waved, even the glass of water is seen on the table. But because of this very fact about the drama the attitude of the audiences toward it furnishes quite as pungent a comment upon religious conditions as anything in the play.

And why? Because this drama relies for its solution upon one of the deepest and most fundamental facts of religious experience; it deals not only with the passion of love but the passion of repentance, worked out through the influence of religious example, and ending in the cry of the erring wife as she falls on her

knees: "Christ shall have Ione! [her little daughter]. Christ shall have me!" — as plain a case of the transfiguring experience known as "conversion" as could well be found. Now, most of us profess, at least, some religion. And those of us who do not, but who have the slightest knowledge of religious literature or who have had the slightest contact with religious gatherings, cannot be so blind as to deny the reality of "conversion," the tremendous force in some people of the orthodox religious emotions. The play, then, deals with realities, with important and vital realities. Yet it is probably a perfectly safe statement — certainly it is a statement made after numerous conversations with all sorts of people, skeptics, believers, Jews, Protestants, and a Roman Catholic, who have seen the play — that for the bulk of the audience the religious motives of the drama have a kind of unreality. As one woman, who attends a church every Sunday and was brought up in the odor of Episcopal sanctity, expressed it, "I'm quite sure *Mrs. Nuneham* loved her child, and almost sure she loved *Dr. Allen*, but her conversion did n't convince me a bit." If Mr. Jones had done his work badly this remark would have no significance. But he has n't. He has, to be sure, smothered his story with a lot of talk — pretty good talk, but talk, none the less —

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but the unconvincing scenes of *Mrs. Nuneham's* conversion are quite as skilfully handled as the scenes with her lover or her child, which do convince. Moreover, her innate susceptibility to religious influence is prepared for from the very first. Why, then, does the drama go lame with the audience, where by every right it should rise up and stride?

In his play Mr. Jones has once more made use of smug and fussy Nonconformist types of clergymen and the narrow and self-satisfied Churchman, setting them over against each other and also over against an evangelist, something between a Salvation Army General and a Moody, who makes them all look, as Mr. Jones intended, like a very ineffective lot of Christians. He has further reintroduced the erring wife to our attention and suggested that her reformation lies through religion as preached by the evangelist, almost through that heightened experience known as "conversion." Over against her he has set her husband, who makes science his religion and is left to its cold and pallid comforts at the end. *Sylvanus Rebbings*, the revivalist, who dominates the drama, would seem to typify in Mr. Jones's purpose a present day attempt to live the life of Christ, and so preach the religion of Christ, to the shame of the creeds. And he further would seem to exem-

plify, in the author's purpose, the perfectly scientific truth that psychologically feeling and conduct, not thought, are the essence of religion. We pray because we can't help it, believe in God because we need Him, are religious because there is something in our nature which demands the uplift and strength of the "not ourselves," a strength so real that reason cannot deny it. Mr. Jones has, in the person of *Fyson*, who calls England the "country of 200 hundred religions and only one sauce," introduced the modern skeptic — the man who has no faith because he has studied them all — as a sort of cynical Greek chorus. And he has preached in no uncertain tones his Emersonian belief that "God builds His temples on the ruin of churches, in the human heart"; that the religious need is eternal; that it must be satisfied if we would find the fullest salvation and peace, and that the way was once shown very plainly and simply, to be reshown to-day not by this or that body of doctrine but, as it happened in this play, by a poor revivalist with the boundless love of God, Man, and straight, honest, charitable living in his heart. All this he has done by telling the story of a wife who erred and was brought to repentance by a revival meeting. Why do we accept her error, but not her repentance? Why is the play a failure?

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For answer we will plunge boldly into a consideration of the case of Mr. S. H. Hadley, who was an active and useful rescuer of drunkards in New York. Let him speak:

"One Tuesday evening I sat in a saloon in Harlem, a homeless, friendless, dying drunkard. I had pawned or sold everything that would buy a drink. I could n't sleep unless I was dead drunk. I had n't eaten for days and for four nights preceding I had suffered with delirium tremens, or the horrors, from midnight till morning. . . . As I sat there thinking I seemed to feel some great and mighty presence. . . . I walked up to the bar and pounded it with my fist till I made the glasses rattle. Those who stood by drinking looked on with scornful curiosity. I said I would never take another drink if I died on the street, and I really felt as though that would happen before morning. Something said: 'If you want to keep this promise go and have yourself locked up.' I went to the nearest station house and had myself locked up."

He was released after a bit and went to his brother's house, where he was put to bed. Then the story goes on:

"When I arose the following Sabbath morning I felt that day would decide my fate and toward evening it came into my head to go to Jerry McAuley's Mission. I went. He rose and 'mid deep silence told his experience. There was a sincerity about this man that carried conviction with it, and I found myself saying: 'I wonder if God can save me?'"

When the invitation was given I knelt down with a crowd of drunkards. Jerry made the first prayer. Oh, what a conflict was going on for my poor soul! A blessed whisper said, 'Come'; the devil said, 'Be careful.' I halted but a moment, and then with breaking heart I said, 'Dear Jesus, can you help me?' Never with mortal tongue can I describe that moment. Although up to that moment my soul had been filled with indescribable gloom, I felt the glorious brightness of the noonday sun shine into my heart. I felt I was a free man. Oh, the precious feeling of safety, of freedom, of resting on Jesus! I felt that Christ with all his brightness and power had come into my life; that, indeed, old things had passed away and all things had become new.

"From that moment till now I have never wanted a drink of whiskey and I have never seen money enough to make me take one."

Dr. Leuba remarks that in this experience there is little or no doctrinal theology; it starts with a need for higher help and ends with a feeling that such help has been found. Mr. Hadley's whole life thereafter was a testimony to the efficacy of his conversion. Now, the internal analogy of this case to that of *Mrs. Nuneham* in the Jones play is striking. She had sinned; on her overwrought nerves at the right moment came the influence of the evangelist; the testimony of her erring sister, whose sin was like her own, convinced her that she, too, would find help in confession; she confessed to her husband; and later she, too,

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found the complete transformation wrought by "resting on Jesus." There was no doctrinal theology about it. Mr. Jones made that plain enough by his satire of the sectarian clergyman. Her transformation caused her to give up her lover, and there is no more reason for supposing that she ever went back to him or that she did not find happiness of a new kind in spite of her sin than there is to doubt this authentic record of Mr. Hadley. Moreover, as Professor James says, "How irrelevantly remote seem all our usual refined optimisms and intellectual and moral consolations in presence of a need of help like this! Here is the real core of the religious problem. Help! Help! No prophet can claim to bring a final message unless he says things that will have a sound of reality in the ears of victims such as these. But the deliverance must come in as strong a form as the complaint if it is to take effect; and that seems a reason why the coarser religions, revivalistic, orgiastic, with blood and miracles and supernatural operations, may possibly never be displaced. Some constitutions need them too much." *Mrs. Nuneham* cried for help; and she found it — some would say in a coarser form of religion. Mr. Jones would say in a strong inpouring of the simple, primitive Christianity. Her case is absolutely authentic. And yet — and yet it leaves us almost

cold and but half convinced when we see it on the stage!

Beside the importance of a fact like this, all bickerings about this or that technical merit or defect in the drama sink to utter insignificance. We are confronted with the question: Are the religious emotions incapable of convincing representation on the stage? And why? Is a whole vast field of human effort and aspiration to be barred from the playhouse, not because it does not exist in life, but because we do not accept it as real and interesting when we see it in a drama? Again, why? The answer in its baldest state is probably not single but double: the reason is partly in us, partly in the drama. Fully to answer the question would require a tabulation of hundreds of personal confessions of theatergoers. Manifestly, then, the answer attempted here is at best perhaps in the nature of a hypothesis.

First, to find the reason for the lack of conviction in stage religious emotions by looking within ourselves. Whatever our religious beliefs or negations, a little introspection will probably disclose to most of us our instinctive feeling that the religious emotions are in their essence something private, intimate, personal. They have their outward manifestations in conduct, but it is in their inwardness, their

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unique quality of seeming to come directly to us from the Beyond without the aid or interposition of human agencies that gives them their peculiar flavor. Ringed around as we all are by the impenetrable wall of personality, living, as Pater says, "in our own dream of a world," there are yet many emotions and passions that seem almost to set us free, to enable us to go out of our own shell and creep for the moment into the shell of a fellow man. Such are the passions of sex love, of motherhood, of jealousy and hatred, of greed, of revenge. *Mrs. Nuneham's* love for her child *Ione*, or for *Dr. Allen*, even her fear of discovery and her sense of shame are directly and vividly understandable to an audience. They speak a common speech; they somehow get in to us over the wall of self. But each man's religious emotions are peculiarly and irrevocably his own. They never come to him from a fellow. And whether they rise from his "subliminal self," as the psychologists say, or come from God, as the Church says, the effect is absolutely the same — they *seem* to come from the Beyond. Therefore, words that can in a measure convey the sense of his other emotions to his fellows, fail when used of these. Therefore, the religious emotions of his fellows have for him, when represented by words — in art or life — a curious unreality. The speech of

the ordinary emotions connects us with a world of facts and with each other. The speech of the religious emotions connects us with a world beyond and above the facts and each separate soul is called on to make the connection for himself. Does not this suggest a partial explanation of why the religious emotions on the stage, and more especially the more heightened and mystic emotions such as conversion, fail as a convincing dramatic motive with a big, mixed, and none too seriously inclined audience? Not every one indeed, even of the most pronounced religious sentiments and convictions, has experienced conversion. Most of us perhaps live all our lives in "a universe one story high," which makes the whole process of transformation in another doubly hard to comprehend; that internal upheaval and change in values which to us who have been more or less true to one single self all our lives seems often perhaps illogical and unreal. Every day, too, religion is insisting less and less on "conversion." The loss of creeds means the loss of certain mental processes. To some of us, possibly, "The Evangelist" seems that most hopeless of all things for a play—old-fashioned. In his attempt to be modern, has not Mr. Jones gone back to the oldest formula of evangelistic "salvation"?

And here also we may see where the stage

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itself has failed to handle these emotions, even in Mr. Jones's play, in the most nearly effective way. For the stage is surely in part to blame. The more intimate and personal the emotion depicted, the more intimate and personal must be the treatment, if the stage would convince. You cannot paint a miniature with a palette knife. You could not represent the soul states of the people in "The Master Builder" by the style of "Virginius." And, with all due respect to Mr. Jones, you cannot represent the conversion of *Mrs. Nuneham* by sublimated melodrama. For when all is said and done, in his serious plays at least, Mr. Jones has never got the virus of "The Silver King" out of his system. *Mrs. Nuneham* is moved to make her confession by watching a revival meeting in full swing. We know what is going on within her mind, we know that it is a perfectly possible situation, which in real life has happened again and again—we know, intellectually. But emotionally we do not know, because her emotions have begun to enter that region of the religious consciousness where they cease to speak a universal language and adopt an utterly personal one. To make us feel with her, her soul state must somehow be laid bare to view. And here the methods of melodrama, even of the ordinary "well made play," are quite inadequate. Perhaps there was a time when the

"Ben Hurs" and "Sign of the Crosses," and other semi-religious plays made some sort of a religious appeal to certain people. But the time for that is over on any considerable scale. Even as religion itself has entered on a new era where the individual standard of judgment prevails, the drama, thanks in a large measure to Ibsen, has entered on a new era where the individual delineation of character and emotion prevails. If a man and a girl kiss each other or a mother embraces her child, even in Eighth Avenue melodrama, we are still ready to believe that they love each other, because their mere act fires in us a whole train of associated ideas drawn from daily life. Habit and convention, too, help the dramatist and actors. But with the more intimate and subtle emotions — among which the religious emotions take first place — no such train awaits to be fired. The dramatist cannot paint these emotions in big, sketchy strokes and hope to win conviction. If once he won a measure of conviction for them by this method it was because the public knew no other way. The other way is known now, and it must be followed when religious emotions are represented.

"In other words," says the heroic reader, if any reader has endured thus far! — "In other words, 'The Galilean's Victory' would have been a better play if Ibsen had written it!"

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Well, the reader's heroism must be rewarded by letting him say what he pleases! Personally I admire Mr. Jones tremendously. His wit, his sincerity, his keen observation, his pungent dialogue, his literary style, are wholly admirable and refreshing. I even forgive him the lack of humor in his treatment of his heroes. For instance, would n't *Rebbings*, in the present play, have gained in appeal and reality if he had possessed just a touch of that quaintness in speech which was exemplified by the English revivalist Billy Bray, who said, "I can't help praising the Lord. As I go along the street I lift up one foot and it seems to say 'Glory,' and I lift up the other and it seems to say 'Amen.'" But we cannot help thinking that it is not so much the quantity of talk after all which causes the lack of conviction in his latest play as it is the touch of antiquity in his methods, the failure to get right down to the intimate exposition, step by step, of *Mrs. Nuneham's* change in heart. The religious nature of this change made his task doubly difficult and perhaps impossible completely to accomplish. But certainly, by applying the methods of Ibsen, he could have accomplished more than he did; he could have made his woman figure live for a far greater portion of his audiences from one end of the play to the other, not only in her erring pas-

sions of sex love and in her motherhood, but in her passion of repentance as well and in her final surrender of herself, of all her warring impulses, to the great peace and security "that passeth understanding."

BUNYAN PERSECUTED AGAIN

(HACKETT, November 11, 1907)

THE failure of "The Evangelist" by Henry Arthur Jones afforded occasion to comment on the difficulty of representing the religious emotions in the drama, especially of representing those subtle, personal emotions, those perhaps morbid doubts and broodings and visions, which constitute the preparation for the great spiritual adventure of conversion, as well as the emotions of conversion itself. After Miss Henrietta Crosman's appearance in a stage version of Bunyan's "Pilgrim Progress," made by James MacArthur, the same remarks are again in order. Bunyan's *Christian*, in fact, may be taken as the classic example of the man who seeks salvation through conversion, — conversion, that is, in the narrower sense of Protestant Christianity. Conversion "denotes the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious real-

ities." Especially to the Nonconformists of Bunyan's day, among whom our Puritan ancestors are counted, this meant first a passionate attention to self, a brooding, melancholy, almost sickly conscience, and then a great release through belief in the Cross, through a concentration of the attention on the life to come. To most of us to-day this does not seem the healthy minded view of the universe; and to many of us both the preliminary despair of soul, conviction of sin, horror at the wickedness of this world and the subsequent exaltation of faith and the renunciation of this world are almost incomprehensible. Yet once they were facts of common experience, and even to-day they are far less uncommon than those of us suppose who live in the white light that beats upon Broadway. And they are the facts which give to "The Pilgrim's Progress" its real significance in the history of the faith and fear of the English nation.

With that truth held fast in mind the utter futility of the present stage version of Bunyan's book becomes doubly apparent. The simple fact that "The Christian Pilgrim" is a bore is, of course, sufficient to condemn it. Indeed, the most ardent workers for the cause of religion should be the first to rejoice in the failure of a play that makes solemn things merely dull and turns the heart of the doubter

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to the other road in instinctive repulsion. The mass of the theatergoing public ask no other excuse to stay away than the plea of dulness, and they are quite right. But there are other excuses to be urged, and first of them is this failure of the stage version to make the story a gripping reality, to make of *Christian* other than a lay figure, to recreate the homely, heart-stinging, emotional appeal of Bunyan's book. Failing in that, it failed absolutely to justify itself. It tampered with a religious and literary masterpiece, and achieved only a kind of paint and pasteboard blasphemy. It may have pleased Miss Crosman by placing her in the center of the stage for long periods, where she could repeat, in a monotonous rising and falling inflection (or rather infliction) the ringing speeches of *Christian*, though in all conscience her *Christian* was far enough away from the rugged, racy, if soul-tortured fellow of Bunyan. It may have pleased her managers by affording them a chance to display lavish if wholly unsuitable scenery, and giving them an opportunity to appear as patrons of Art with a big A. But to all who love the Christian religion, of whatever sect; to all who revere English literature and enter with unshod feet at the portals of Bunyan's masterpiece, to all who hold the various arts of music and drama and fiction in proper appreciation and

respect for their differences, this stage version of "The Pilgrim's Progress" is an ill-timed, misjudged, ineffective presumptuous thing. There is no use trying to excuse it on the ground that it "meant well," that it "tried to do something fine." It did not try to do something fine, but something presumptuous and silly. It ought never to have been put on the stage.

"So hot, my little Sir?" as Emerson used to say. Yes, so hot! For you cannot love the drama unless you love other art forms as well. You cannot estimate the worth of a play unless you are in love with life. You cannot respect a playwright unless you respect his brother craftsmen. And when you see a great passage of original literature such as the description of the fight between *Apollyon* and *Christian* reduced to the weak absurdity of a stage duel with tin swords, your shame for the stage is in proportion to your love for great literature. Or when your childish mind has pondered with awe in the dark of your little chamber over those words of the Psalmist, "Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil"; and your youth time has seen you stand at the open grave of him who gave you life and the Shadow of Death was very heavy upon you and the evil well nigh impossible not to fear;

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and your adult years have found you still pondering that Shadow that looms ever larger across your path, filling the mind with a great, dim, solemn, terrible imagery, amplifying even the imagery of Bunyan with worldless pictures of your own; when this has taken place within you, to see the Valley of the Shadow of Death depicted on the stage of a Broadway theatre by crudely painted pasteboard and gauze curtains is more than ridiculous — it is painful, it is torture. And you marvel at the mind which could have conceived such a thing, even while you suffer.

It is no answer that stage versions of "The Pilgrim's Progress" have been played in other lands and tongues. It is no answer that other masterpieces of literature have been sliced up for stage use. One act of vandalism does not excuse another. And not only does the piece of literature vandalized suffer, but in the long run the stage suffers too. It suffers because it invites a comparison that it cannot endure, because it falls so far below the work it seeks to copy that in the spectator familiar with the original a certain scorn of the dramatic medium is unconsciously bred. Nothing, of course, could be more unjust to the stage, which within its own limits is invincibly vivid and compelling. Its failure is due to the unwise men who would push it beyond its limits.

In such a case as the one immediately under discussion not only was it pushed beyond its limits but the effort to make a play out of "The Pilgrim's Progress" was still further impeded by a complete misconception of the place and power of theatrical scenery. Down at Dreamland, Coney Island, the more than Miltonic imagery of the first chapter of Genesis is shown in stage pictures. For a quarter you can see chaos in its birth throes; you can see the dry land emerge; finally you can see Adam and Eve in pink union suits listening to the property canaries and preparing to raise Cain. It reminds you of Wright Lorimer's alleged remark after he had produced "The Shepherd King." "I've found," he is reported to have said, "lots of other good stuff in the Bible to dramatize." All such exhibitions are a relic of the ancient Miracle and Morality plays of the Middle Ages; they have persisted down to the present time, at Coney Island and similar places, influenced to be sure by electricity and David Belasco, but in the main living out their lives quite apart from the great body of English drama to which they once gave birth. Just so, schoolboys in America, who have never heard of Professor Child's collection of English and Scottish Ballads, to this day sing to a primitive tune a certain indecent ballad which was probably old in Chaucer's time and which

may be found in the oral literature of every European people. These exhibitions, for all their use of modern scenery, are relics of the Middle Ages; they are popular anachronisms, handed down from a primitive day and bearing no more relation to the drama of the present than "Annie Rooney" does to the music of Richard Strauss.

But these Miracle and Morality plays before they rose on the one hand into English drama and sank on the other into Coney Island side shows achieved a certain literary distinction of their own, a certain simple power and pathos that we recently saw when Miss Matheson played "Everyman." But they achieved it not by elaborate scenery (which indeed was then unknown), but by beauty of speech and sincerity of feeling. The great images of *Death* and the *Eternal*, the allegorical representations of the human passions, were not attempted on a grand scale that should vie with the Eternal Himself, but quaintly hinted only, and the beholder was left to fill out the picture from his own imagination with the help of lovely language. *Death* in "Everyman" was just a man with a drum, a skeleton painted in his gray clothes. Yet how much more potent was he over the imagination than, say, the *Beelzebub* of "The Christian Pilgrim," with his property electric lights, his illuminated sword, his sur-

rounding backdrops and gauze curtains and all the rest of the machinery. *Everyman* roamed through the world on a bare stage — and the bare stage became the world. *Christian* journeyed the steep road to the Celestial City through eleven sets of elaborate scenery — and they were just eleven sets of elaborate scenery. Had they not been forced to challenge comparison with the incomparably superior and vastly different imagery of Bunyan, had they but represented generalities of the religious imagination instead of specific scenes from a great prose poem, they would still have been only eleven sets of scenery; they would still have failed of their effect. For they were trying to do what stage scenery cannot do. They were trying to translate images that dwell on the cloudy heights and in the sky spaces of the human imagination into the narrow, realistic terms of the theater. Words can translate sometimes and do often suggest these images. Music can float them out on its harmonies. Blake once caught them and painted the morning stars singing together. But the men who paint scenery for Henry B. Harris and Maurice Campbell cannot catch them; they cannot be reproduced by canvas and colored lights in a Broadway play-house. At Dreamland, Coney Island, "A Christian Pilgrim" might very well vie with "Creation" as a sample of

an archaic form of primitive play and spectacle "brought up to date." On Broadway as a sample of the developed modern drama it has little place. One might almost lay down as a law that the growth and perfection of scenic illusion in the theater is inseparable from the growth and perfection of realism in the drama. Whenever a play begins to float away from realism, to drift into the mystic regions of poetry and romance, of the supernatural and the allegorical, the fierce light of disillusion begins to beat upon the scenery. And when the play has floated clear up and away into those regions of pure imagination, when its scenes have been transported to the Valley of the Shadow of Death, to the foot of the Cross, to the City Celestial, words alone, and they but hardly, may avail to transport the beholder to such exalted spots. Here the hint is worth more than the mechanic's realization, here the spark that fires the train of suggestion is the only effective illumination.

Perhaps in Miss Crosman's play the setting which most nearly realized Bunyan's flavor and imagery was that for *The House Beautiful*, which had a certain cleanly brightness, a sweet sunny simplicity, even if *Piety*, *Charity* and *Prudence* were hardly as attractive to look upon as very like they should be, though personal pulchritude has never been a quality

supremely associated with these estimable virtues. But even as you looked upon them and upon *Christian* sitting in their midst and heard snatches of that high talk they indulged in together, even as you beheld the property goblets and the basket of fruit which you were curious to test for its reality, the memory of the book came over you and everything before you up there on the stage seemed mockery and sham. After all, that book is perfection, you thought. After all, it does in its own way, in its own medium, something supremely great in a supremely great manner. After all, to slice it up and boil it down and toss it out upon the boards is wickedness and sacrilege. And while Miss Crosman's voice droned sing-song from the stage and the sunlight spluttered and a bit of the canvas stone roof of the house waved in a draught and the audience coughed restlessly these were the words that your inner ear heard like a solemn accusation:

"Thus they discoursed together till late at night; and after they had committed themselves to their Lord for protection, they betook themselves to rest: the Pilgrim they laid in a large upper chamber, whose windows opened toward the sun-rising: the name of the chamber was Peace; where he slept till break of day, and then he awoke and sang."

"THE SERVANT IN THE HOUSE"

(SAVOY, March 23, 1908)

ACAREFUL consideration of all the objections raised to "The Servant in the House" by Charles Rann Kennedy, inspires the reflection that a considerable number of people regard Mr. Kennedy's play as a descent from the sublime to the religious. This is important, as it of course calls for a redefinition, both of sublimity and religion. For that task of redefining, however, the present reviewer feels himself in all humility incapable. It must be intrusted rather to those pregnant minds who have made it necessary. And, great as the drawback undoubtedly is, "The Servant in the House" must needs be discussed here under those conceptions of sublimity and religion, with their attendant qualities, which poor, mistaken humanity has so long accepted in theory and painfully striven for in practice. We would gladly rewrite even the Gospels if we could, realizing with one commentator, that a mere restatement of them can contain nothing new, that it is inevitably "trite." But our flowerless prose, our lack of his sonorous rhet-

oric, is alone a sufficient deterrent. We must humbly pass on the job.

Is there no spot to be saved for any earnest reality except "the poor little enclosure behind the altar rail"? Mr. Kennedy's play, which is truly a modern Morality, not a sermon nor a tract, but a statement of applied or ethical religion in terms of the drama, a play with its own dramatic appeal and human significance, attempts to say that a spot shall be saved, and that spot — the stage. Jesters have risen up to smite this daring author; his restatements of the Sermon on the Mount are characterized by one as "the most obvious and irreproachable platitudes that mental mediocrity could devise or stodgy dulness admire, concerning morality and the brotherhood of mankind." Another suggests, of the *Servant*, that "this impressive figure, clothed in its mysticism, scarcely lent itself to the job of passing around the toast." If any argument were really needed in justification of the play, which is amply justified by its sheer dramatic appeal, this last sentiment quoted would furnish it. If, after nineteen hundred years, the message of the Gospels is so misunderstood that a critic of whatever race or creed can miss entirely this symbolism of service, then all his and everybody's else contentions that "The Servant in the House" is needless because it is

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"trite," because it states "nothing new," fall in a heap, self-refuted.

As a matter of fact, not to mince matters, not in the face of anything so sincere as this play to be guilty of insincerity and half truths, the objections to "The Servant in the House" disguise themselves as they may under chatter of art for art's sake, or the thrice tiresome and fundamentally meaningless assertion that "the mission of the stage is not to preach," are in reality based on ethical unresponsiveness, on that shallow and cowardly fear of the serious, the deep, the truth-seeking, which characterizes minds suspicious of moral passion or dulled by the material environment, the cares and the pleasures of a daily life bounded by a narrow horizon. It was against this unresponsiveness, this fear, that "The Servant in the House" had to fight for its stage life, and it is to the credit of New York theatergoers that the victory was signal. The discussion which waged about the play was in itself "a sort of a compliment," as *Smee* would say in "Peter Pan," and it was the means of bringing the work widely before the public, drawing to the theater the curious, who in most cases remained as converts. That much of history may be allowed, however interjaculary. "The effect of any writing on the public mind," says Emerson, "is mathematically

measured by its depth of thought. How much water does it draw? If it awaken you to think, if it lift you from your feet with the great voice of eloquence, then the effect is to be wide, slow, permanent, over the minds of men; if the pages instruct you not, they will die like flies in the hour." It is a sad reflection that plays which do instruct, however, are the plays too apt to perish in the hour. Therefore to record the success of "The Servant in the House," not between covers but in the theater, is important.

The austere lofty soul of James Martineau has passed full orb'd into the spirit land. His words live, nor do we fear to be "trite" in repeating them. In the middle of the last century he wrote, "Our current notions of benevolence have descended to us from the recent times of feudalism; yet we are conscious that they do not come up to the higher demands which have arisen, or adapt themselves to the new intellectual and moral wants comprised in any Christian estimate of the poor in this world. The ease of ancient condescension is gone; the grateful recognition of human brotherhood is not attained. To aim at making men like ourselves into creatures with enough to eat — though a thing unrealized as yet — is felt to be insufficient, and how to raise them into the likeness of the children of God

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we cannot tell — the very notion receiving at present but a timid acknowledgment."

And does anybody fancy that this "grateful recognition of human brotherhood" has been made in the brief half century since the sermon on "Winter Worship" was written? Does any one fancy that the notion of raising our brothers into "the likeness of God" is much more boldly acknowledged to-day? Go to the Rev. Percy Grant's Sunday evening Socialistic debates and you will hear speaker after speaker affirm that the Bread Line has no soul, only a belly. And those speakers are not the sentimental philanthropists, who are shocked by the sentiment, but the men from the East Side, the young Socialists, who have invaded this Fifth Avenue church burning with reality and confronted by conditions. The mere task of making their brothers into "creatures with enough to eat" is all they can grapple; it absolutely limits their horizon. "The Bread Line itself may not be divine, but the men in it are," said a speaker in refutation. And came a woman's voice, "Is it the diviner the longer it is?"

The speaker had no answer. Have you, you who object to "The Servant in the House" because of its "platitudes" about human brotherhood, because there is "nothing new" in it, because in your busy life you have not

waked to wonder "and who is my brother?" to contrast your professions with your practice, your faith with your works, and resent in the theater any play which sounds an alarm bell to your sleepy conscience — have you any answer? You object to "The Servant in the House," perhaps, because "it does not prove anything"? As if any play ever proved anything! As if any play could prove anything about a problem that all over the world real men have wrestled with and are wrestling with and will wrestle with so long as the human spirit struggles upward through every changing cycle of civilization, which ever needs not proofs but inspirations, the inspiration of such plays as "The Servant in the House" no less than others! Let us bid this Servant set our house in order, too; let us clean out the drains, let us have done with cant and hypocrisy and at least acknowledge that if the play does not thrill and move us, seems stupid, tiresome, that is perhaps because our hearts do not answer to the call of our brothers, whatever our heads may do, because our emotions are not fired by the ethical purposes of the world, because we do not care or do not dare, not to apply, but merely to see applied, the simple test of Christian conduct — "How would Christ have acted here?"

For, after all, if Christianity has survived

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its many colored shells of creeds and dogmas, if it has spread beyond churches and professions of faith, that simple test of conduct has been the persistent element that could not be lost. Unitarians and Liberal Jews and Socialists, men who enter no church portals and the robed priest before the high altar and the Cross, can apply it. It asks for no faith save faith in the best instincts of the human heart. And Mr. Kennedy in his play evokes no dogmas; rather does he bury them in that drain below the church. He holds no brief for any theology, he neither offends nor flatters any sect. Because religion in his play is not personal but humanitarian, not a matter of individual "conversion," but ethical passion, the gospel of Brotherhood, he avoids the unreality for the modern mind of Mr. Jones's "Evangelist." He merely evokes the spirit and the humanity of the historic Christ, giving Him bodily form, as he needs must do for purposes of his allegory, and lets us see how, as he supposes, the Christ would work out the problems of a concrete household, how the Christ spirit would differ from and put to shame the life of to-day. It was a bold attempt and only to be justified by a fine achievement. But the achievement is fine. Through the devious ways of modern dramatic technique Mr. Kennedy has reached the simplicity of a Morality

play and speaks to his generation of higher things in a voice that his generation can yet understand.

And does his Morality mean socialism? Or does it mean that he would tear down all the churches that are built over the drains and moldering cesspools of lies and deceit? *The Drain Man* grasps hands with the *Servant* when he learns the latter is a socialist, crying "That's what I am, too!" But his socialism, to the larger view of the *Servant*, is a belief in "fighting with his class against all the other classes." With a quiet, kindly, almost amused gesture the *Servant* banishes such socialism, the kind the legislatures might decree, but how far from the sort He means! The Morality is indeed thus almost a rebuke of the socialism now rampant in print and on platform; it goes deeper than that. Socialism for Him means something *voluntary*, a distinction that is surely just now hardly over insisted on. The socialists themselves are the ones most likely to object to the drift of Mr. Kennedy's drama here.

And as for his scathing satire on conventional religion, his bitter smelling allegory of the church built over a festering tomb only to be cleaned up by a common laborer, proud of his station, and a vicar who throws away his cassock, doubtless Mr. Kennedy will be

glad to let you think what you like. Martin-eau (still to test this play by the loftiest standards) said from his pulpit that our worship "has become a *commemoration*, telling what once He was to happier spirits of our race, and how grateful we are for the dear old messages that faintly reach our ear, how we will cherish the last remnant of that precious and only sure memorial — the fragile and consecrated link between His sphere and ours. . . . Or, if we direct our face the other way . . . we fall into the insincerity of coming before God by way of keeping ourselves in practice and turning our religion into a *rehearsal*." In other words, our religion is not a thing of here and now, but ever of the future or the past. That is all these dead bodies beneath the church in the play need to mean.

But if you are a man saddened by the sight of churches filled Sunday after Sunday with old women and little girls, if you are a man wearied by pulpit discourses that do not meet your needs or that even violate your reason and experience, if the bickerings of sects, the claims and counter-claims of creeds and dogmas disgust you, Mr. Kennedy will not much care if you meet his allegory more than half way, and start tearing down flying buttresses. For in one of the most eloquently written speeches of the play, and a speech eloquently

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delivered by Walter Hampden as the *Servant*, with beauty of voice, nobility and dignity of utterance and a sincerity that stamped him as an artist and a man of feeling, Mr. Kennedy builds another church, the Church Universal, where all may worship together.

The pillars of it go up like the brawny trunks of heroes, the sweet human flesh of men and women is moulded about its bulwarks, strong, impregnable; the faces of little children laugh out from every corner-stone; the terrible spans and arches of it are the joined hands of comrades, and up in the heights and spaces there are inscribed the numberless musings of all the dreamers of the world. It is yet building — building and built upon. Sometimes, the work goes forward in deep darkness, sometimes in blinding light; now beneath the burden of unutterable anguish, now to the tune of a great laughter and heroic shoutings like the cry of thunder. Sometimes, in the silence of the night time, one may hear the tiny hammerings of the comrades at work up in the dome — the comrades that have climbed ahead.

"The numberless musings of all the dreamers of the world!" One of these dreamers is Mr. Kennedy; one of these musings is "The Servant in the House." The Celtic imagination of Walter Hampden — for he bears in reality a Celtic name, if his home is Brooklyn and his training English — played with the dream and loved it and made it very real and

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very reverent and deep and sweet. He was aided by a company, especially by Tyrone Power, who caught the fire of its purpose and knew how to utter it in terms of human feeling, who could win tears for a father's grief or a daughter's longing as well as point the allegory. So the play delivered its message at the Savoy Theater, in Thirty-fourth Street, just off Broadway. It is not flippantly to be dismissed; it is not lightly to be discussed; it is not to be discussed at all in the set terms of criticism, for this or that flaw in technique or construction, this or that failure to measure up to rule, sink to insignificance before the fact that it dreams a dream, that it hears those hammers tapping up in the dome, that it speaks a message of which the conventional drama knows nothing, a message to the spiritual longings of men. How strange that we should be talking so of a drama on our Alley, our gay, irresponsible, frivolous Alley, with its merry widows and the rest! How strange that we should have the chance, perhaps even the inclination! We rub our eyes, yet still we find ourself awake, and still the fact persists that "The Servant in the House" was visible at the Savoy Theater, in Thirty-fourth Street, just off Broadway, to speak to us, if we would but listen, to win our tears, to shame our petty prides and selfish aims, in the city's

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dust and din and fearful complexities of choice and conduct, to hint a simple standard as the one solution, and to breathe on some of us again perhaps "the silence of immortal hopes."

HARPS IN THE AIR

(Bijou, September 23, 1907)

As pen and ink alike serve him who sings
In high or low or intermediate style;
As the same stone hath shapes both rich and vile
To match the fancies that each master brings;
So, my loved lord, within thy bosom springs
Pride mixed with meekness and kind thoughts that smile:
Whence I draw naught, my sad self to beguile,
But what my face shows — dark imaginings.
He who for seed sows sorrow, tears, and sighs,
(The dews that fall from heaven, though pure and clear,
From different germs take divers qualities)
Must needs reap grief and garner weeping eyes;
And he who looks on beauty with sad cheer
Gains doubtful hope and certain miseries.

MICHAEL ANGELO, MASTER BUILDER.

HENRIK IBSEN is one of the most popular playwrights in America to-day, a statement which may surprise some people. Scorned, abused, heaped with vile epithets alike in England and the United States when his works first began to be translated, so that William Winter's reviews of "Ghosts" were in far greater need of expurgation than the drama could be, Ibsen has now come into his own. His printed

plays are among the books most in demand in the New York public libraries, they are sold in great numbers at the book shops, they are a part of all collegiate courses in the drama. Mrs. Fiske has played "A Doll's House," "Hedda Gabler" and "Rosmersholm," the last for the entire season of 1907-8. Mary Shaw has played "Ghosts" from coast to coast, with great success. Ethel Barrymore has played "A Doll's House"; that drama, indeed, figures almost every week in the program of some stock company through the country. Wright Lorimer has played "A Wild Duck." Richard Mansfield's last season was given over to a production of "Peer Gynt." Even "When We Dead Awaken" has been tried in New York in the commercial theater. Of "special performances" of various of his plays there have been many, and during the past two seasons a new Ibsen interpreter has been added to our stage in the panther-like person of Alla Nazimova, a Russian Jewess who came to America to play in Russian and remained to learn our language and conquer our native public.

The one she has accomplished well enough; the other completely. Her *Hedda Gabler* was a high-born exotic, an orchid of a woman, baleful, fascinating — and to some of us not at all like Ibsen's heroine. But it attracted the pub-

lic. Her *Nora* in "A Doll's House" was quite different. The actress even looked different. She had shrunk physically. She had shed ten years of her life. She was a nibbling little squirrel of a woman, who nosed into surreptitious candy bags, romped on the floor with her children, made physical love to her husband with absolute animal innocence. Nazimova was more than ever hailed by the public. Her continental love for showing off the arts of impersonation, her facile and effective handling of the whole pack of actor's tricks, delighted even those who did not find much sincerity behind her marvelous technique — who felt, for instance, that her *Nora* in the third act quite lacked the real suggestion of intellectual awakening, something which mere technique cannot give, and which Mrs. Fiske made so thrilling. Those who did not feel this lack hailed her as the greatest actress since Duse. It was partly, no doubt, this personal popularity of the dark, sensuously fascinating Russian, this "tiger cat in the leash of art," won in the brief space of a year, that enabled her to put on "The Master Builder" at the Bijou Theater, New York, September 23, 1907, and to keep it on for almost two months, a remarkable run for this most baffling and subtle of all the grim old Norseman's plays. Excellently supported by Walter Hampden in

the title part, she flung down this pearl of symbolism before — well, before any chance Broadway audience that cared to come. And though some critics raged and some theater-goers scoffed, she demonstrated what a considerable public there is, after all, for the more subtle things of art and she showed us what a vast field of poetry, symbolism, suggestion, still lies untrodden by our native actors and authors.

It was not until 1906, when their correspondence was published, that the world knew of the romance — if romance it can be called — between Ibsen and eighteen-year-old Emilie Bardach of Vienna, which began and apparently ended at Gossensass in the summer of 1889. Ibsen was sixty-one. Autumn lured Spring, or at any rate was profoundly disquieted by Spring; also interested in Spring as copy! That Spring loved Autumn, Autumn at least believed. Edmund Gosse records that Ibsen said at this time, "Oh, you can always love, but I am happier than the happiest, for I am beloved." On his seventieth birthday he wrote to his "princess," "That summer at Gossensass was the most beautiful and the most harmonious portion of my whole existence. I scarcely venture to think of it, and yet I think of nothing else. Ah! forever!" And Ibsen, being an artist, made copy of the

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episode; he made "The Master Builder." Grim old Norwegian, whiskered prober of social sores, merciless technician, iconoclast, individualist, he was a Sentimental Tommy to the end! And just because he was a Sentimental Tommy none can ever say how much of "The Master Builder" is autobiography, how much is not. Perhaps he himself could not have told, if he would. Only we know that it had its base on fact, on the experiences of one of the world's great artists in his sixty-first year with a young girl of eighteen. It cannot be ignored as fantastic, then, as silly, as meaningless. Rather must we admit, if we do not comprehend it, that our souls are too small, our natures too lacking in complexity. It faces us as one of the most fascinating, if one of the most baffling works in modern literature.

Those tiresome people who are forever telling you that a successful drama must tell its story by means of "action" forget — or, rather, they never knew — that the sight of a man whose mere life is at stake at the point of a pistol is infinitely less interesting, dramatic, important than the sight of a man whose soul is at stake at the point of another's ideas and inspiration. Such people have no place at "The Master Builder." In front of this surcharged, half-mystic drama, where men

and women sit and talk while thrilling events come to birth and fruition in their souls, your ordinary theatergoer looking for his "story" halts. And ordinary criticism halts, too. There is a time when the critic must adventure on his own way and report alone his own impressions. The best he can hope is that he may persuade others to adventure where he has gone, with the seeing eye and the understanding heart; the worst, that he may be considered fantastic, perhaps by that writer of popular fiction in the audience at Nazimova's first night who said that he did n't know what the play meant, and if he did he would n't admit it. First and foremost, then, what is it in this drama, inherent in its very structure, oozing through its dialogue, which renders the common cants of criticism vain, making the commentaries of William Archer or Brandes or the rest alike unsatisfactory? These men tell what the play is about, what it means (no one of them agreeing with any other!), but they do not get the secret of its haunting thrill into words.

Leaving the technique of Scribe forever behind him with the tarentella dance in Act II of "A Doll's House," Ibsen struck out into new waters. From then on his dramas were dramas of mental states, his theater the brain, and his technique boiled away all *quid pro quo*,

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all the tricks and artifices of the "well made play," became so subtly simple that it seems utterly artless. Everything happens because that is the sort of people the characters were, the plays are written by the finger of fate. The result was comprehensible to anybody in "Hedda Gabler" and "Ghosts." But in "The Master Builder" a new element appears, and remains to the end in "When We Dead Awaken."

And it is this new element that makes the play so hauntingly strange and baffling. Mæterlinck has named it "secondary dialogue." Over and above what the characters say, running along between the lines, cropping out now and again in touches of symbolic speech, is a conversation between their souls. And in this is the real drama, in this mystic region as far from the ordinary world of the theater as it is close to the world you and I, in our deepest moments of intercourse with those we love, know to be our ultimate reality. What words can represent it? Can you put into language the secret influences that come to you from the heart of the one you love, the not-to-be-resisted power of your own ideals, the voices that seem to urge you from the air? You try in vain to recall a forgotten name, yet one day it comes walking unsought into your mind from out that great, dim marginal field of conscious-

ness which modern psychology is beginning to teach us is the source even of our religion. And how much of our converse with those nearest and dearest does this same dim part of the brain supply, itself supplied, perhaps, by some unguessed telepathy, so that a mere report of the words that passed between us — poor commonplaces of daily speech — would be pitifully inadequate even to hint at the depth and meaning of our relations! Such soul speech there is between *Hilda* and *Solness*, plainly baffling to the other characters on the stage. (Alas! baffling too, perhaps, to how many in the audience?) That is what *Hilda* meant when she cried out that she knew the *Master Builder* better than the rest of them. That is why again and again during the performance of the play I myself and others I have talked with actually forgot to listen to the words passing on the stage, fascinated by the curious sensation that currents of influence and understanding were leaping from this man to this girl and back again, tense and exciting, like sparks between the knobs of an induction coil.

It remained for Ibsen to suggest this super-speech in the drama, to win a technique clairvoyant and subtle enough to carry it. "The Master Builder" is a play of the subconscious elements of man. That is why you cannot get

its strange thrill into words; that is why your own subconsciousness jumps out to meet it; that is why, perhaps, there is so much doubt as to its more external meanings. And that is why you are told by numerous commonplace, unimaginative people that it is no drama at all. But drama it is, of a new and strange and wonderful sort. And whether you take its externals to picture, in Archer's words, "the history of a sickly conscience side by side with a robust conscience"; or, with Lugné-Poë, consider it "an heroic drama of pride"; or believe it to mean that *Hilda* as the spirit of the new generation created the *Master Builder's* soul anew, so that he once more stood on the heights; or believe it to mean that no man's soul can be created anew, so that he fell to death when he tried to stand a second time on the heights; or conceive it as the tragedy of a great artist, who must ever love anew for inspiration: whether you accept one or all of these interpretations does not matter much after all. What matters is the mere presence of this soul speech between the brooding *Master Builder*, who defies our ultimate analysis, and *Hilda*, of whom he says: "You are like a dawning day. When I look at you I seem to be looking toward the sunrise."

Solness, the Builder, is in reality the chief figure in the drama. But with Nazimova as

Hilda naturally the interest centered in seeing what this remarkable Russian would do as a dawning day. And what she did was at times marvelous in its minute fidelity to the surface of life and its haunting suggestion of the depths below the surface. It was a new Nazimova who entered, alpenstock in hand, a very girl, it seemed. The contrast with her languid, tall, full-blown *Hedda* was remarkable. She was short, slight, and in every line and gesture unmistakably, buoyantly girlish. Different clothes, a different hat, the hair done differently? Yes, but the secret was not there. Rather it lay in her so vivid imagination that in some mysterious way the part she was playing wrote itself out upon her form and features. There was thought and plan and study behind that first awkward handshake so typical of a young girl from the country, and in the position of her feet as she stood against the wall, and in her free hop upon the bookkeeper's stool, or her manner of plumping down into a chair or on the floor; but it was study guided and made utterly spontaneous by her unerring imagination.

Which, of course, is not to say that there do not exist deeper or shallower conceptions of what the life of a part is. And this life Nazimova was to live as *Hilda* contained depths she did not sound. At her first entrance like a

spring wind, you knew that the "younger generation" had come pounding at the door, that there was new breath of inspiration, that something was going to happen to *Solness*. But her second act palpably fell off, partly because the unexpectedly fine and intelligent performance of *Solness* by Walter Hampden grew a little monotonous under the strain — the part is a veritable Hamlet in length and its demands are tremendous — and partly because she herself was a little lost in playing this game for a man's soul where the lure had nothing of the physical. For the sexual allurements of *Hilda*, except in a smothered, unconscious way, is not exercised till that strange love scene just before the final curtain; her allurements are all of "the sunrise and the dawning day"; she came to put new wine of effort into the *Master Builder's* veins by her free, fearless faith in him, her perfect understanding, and her influence was not of the body, it was of the ideal, the aged artist's rediscovered dream of the ideal, *Solness* not being the first great artist whose need was always to find it in a woman. Subdue her sexual allurements as she would, Nazimova could not quite vitalize steadily and firmly this feature of the character. But she rose in the final act to put forth the sex appeal at last with poignant eloquence, to claim her own. And her achievement of so much of the "secondary dialogue"

was in itself a triumph, on our stage where everything must be downright, explicit. Only a continental actress, perhaps, could have done it. We may say that Nazimova is "insincere," that her art consists of cleverly handled tricks; but the fact remains that she has brought something to our stage it did not possess before, something modern, subtle, exciting, the power to suggest finer shades of meaning, symbols in the dialogue, to speak the speech and the super-speech as well, unknown to our native players or our authors, either.

But what of the *Master Builder* himself? What of this egotistical old artist inspired by a chit of a girl to attempt once more "the impossible"? How many secrets does he not hide, how many searchings of our own aspirations does he not inspire? The play is, in reality, his soul story, narrated to *Hilda*; finally, at the end, shaped by *Hilda*. What are we to make of this story?

When Nazimova produced the play in New York one of the ablest (and oldest) of the critics wrote, "Inasmuch as no two of [the commentators], seemingly, are able to agree upon its true meaning or upon the nature of the message which it is supposed to convey, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that a good many of them belong to the numerous body of youthful enthusiasts who are prone to see

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something deep and wonderful in whatever they themselves do not fully comprehend." Exactly! I was discussing Ibsen once with a man older than I. He admitted that he had never seen one of Ibsen's plays performed. "But," said he with an air of finality, "I've read everything William Winter has written on the subject. And when you are as old as I am," he added, "you will think as I do." "Probably," said I. "That is one of the tragedies of growing up!" It is, unfortunately, a sign of advancing years to lose faith in the unintelligible. I once heard William James tell a young woman who had not understood his lecture on Pragmatism that it is good for all of us now and then to listen to something we don't understand. Sometimes, no doubt, the unintelligible is n't worth understanding. But it is far better, as well as more modest, to infer that it hides a secret our minds are not yet large enough to grasp, rather than to infer that our minds must be able to grasp anything worth grasping. Perhaps, in reality, this arrogant attitude of age is but a sign of mental laziness. Life is a riddle none of us has read. For a space we try; then we grow tired, preferring the peace of our fireside and the Belasco drama. Ibsen is a trumpet call to youth. Like Emerson he preaches not philosophy, but effort. Though "The Master Builder" is the story of an aging

artist, its message is to youth. There is something of the *Peter Pan* in the artist. He refuses to grow up. He must refuse to grow up, or he could not keep on creating, playing his game of make-believe. But some of him grows up, and knows the make-believe for something other than his boyish half supposes. Doubts come; the adult ego sees cruelties committed by the boy ego in its acts of creation; something of the old, wild enthusiasm is gone; where once the act followed the thought now courage is lacking; the Viking conscience is no more. And the aging artist turns to youth. September wooes May-time. Heaven help the artist's wife. He must be cruel to the last.

Now all this is set forth in "The Master Builder," directly, unmistakably, in the regulation terms of the psychology of the theater. Doubtless Ibsen meant *Solness* to be a bit autobiographical, a poet, not an architect. The church towers he first built were the early poetic dramas, the "homes for human beings," the later domestic dramas, and finally "the castles in the air," the last of the plays, metaphysical speculations, lyric soul states. But there is nothing symbolic about the jealousies of *Mrs. Solness*, there is nothing symbolic about the *Master Builder's* doubts and broodings over the human tragedies that have followed

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his devouring career as a great artist, the more as he seems to have had a kind of telepathic power over those about him, so that he finally came to believe that what he willed would often come to pass — a belief in part scientifically justifiable, in part, perhaps, sheer mysticism, but very human and perplexing. Nor is there anything symbolic about this tremendous egotism of his. *He cannot give up his art*, for all his doubts and regrets. He must go on building. And he must have inspiration. He must, in short, have *Hilda*. He knows that retribution will come, in a world where the individual cannot live his fullest without injuring others. That is his tragedy, that one of life's tragedies, one of its ironies, and the Nemesis which hangs over this drama. But so far all is plain, a study of the artist by one of the greatest of the tribe.

It is *Hilda* who makes the real trouble for the critics. And it is *Hilda*, perhaps, who is the real symbol, as well as a very human figure, exercising a very genuine and physical allure-ment over the *Master Builder*. She is youth, hard, uncompromising, demanding her kingdom here and now on the table. Is that why the old men flee from the play, assuring us it means nothing? Do they know only too well what it means? We all set out in life after a kingdom, and we all go down to a grave "in a

vale of the land of Moab." Eternal effort, eternal aspiration, is there no surer happiness? There is none nobler, Ibsen would say. And youth, with passionate scorn, would urge the aged seeker ever onward and upward. "Oxford," exclaimed Matthew Arnold, "home of lost causes and impossible loyalties!" "Just once more, *Mr. Solness!*" pleads *Hilda*. "Do the impossible once again!" On no other terms will she have him. That is her kingdom, to keep him ever striving for the impossible, ever climbing higher than he can, higher than he dares — as high, in fact, as he hopes and dreams! That is the trumpet call to youth in "The Master Builder"; that, perhaps, why the aged will not, dare not, hearken.

But *Solness* fell and was dashed to pieces. Brittle age crashed against unyielding youth, *Solness* against *Hilda*, and went down like crockery. What is the answer to the riddle here? Perhaps there is no answer. Life does not answer our questionings, why should Ibsen? Poor *Solness*, poor *Hilda*, their hearts tugged and pulled by the Troll o' dreams within them both, must their end always be but castles in the air? What builder, however much a master, can build the stairs that reach to a castle in the air? As the play floats up into symbolism, into allegory, it points no path to the unattainable,

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it kindles no beacon on the heights. Only in the laboring darkness it comes like a voice from the higher ledges, "Hope on, and climb!" Oh, grim old Norwegian, it was cruel of you to insult our critics so! They know well enough that life is plain and simple and easy, that striving for the dream is no part of it, that it is far better and saner, instead of building castles in the air which cannot be reached, to own your little home in Flatbush, easily reached and quickly by the Brooklyn Rapid Transit. What is all this mystic talk about effort and aspiration and freedom and "harps in the air," this setting of problems without a solution, this stirring up of our souls into a brief, bitter moment of doubt whether life has any solution, save only always to strive? Why, even Charles Klein can settle the problems of life for you in the drama neatly and expeditiously — that is, what few problems life has, such as trusts and labor questions. No, grim old Norwegian, we "youthful enthusiasts" are all wrong about you! You are shallow and meaningless and mean. You cannot read us the riddle of life, tell us the destiny of man. You can only hint at mysteries, trumpet-call to effort toward the dream, paint castles in the air. Go back and sit by the Sphinx and be ashamed of yourself. We will put by our youth as fast as we can and apologize for our enthusiasms and

insist that every character on the stage shall be as simple and plain and easy to read as life itself is. That will be something worth doing — and may we be struck dead when we do it!

NAZIMOVA AS THE LADY LISA

(Bijou, December 30, 1907)

OWEN JOHNSON has dramatized the Lady Lisa. Probably he did it unconsciously; and probably Nazimova is virginally ignorant of Walter Pater. But to see "The Comet" is certainly to recall, not Kipling's crude poem about the Vampire, with its rag and its bone and its hank of hair appropriated from the Sacred Books of Buddha, nor the cruder picture it accompanied as text; but rather, if a little vaguely and a little apologetically, that passage of incomparable prose from "The Renaissance," from the essay on Leonardo da Vinci, beginning, "Hers is the head upon which all 'the ends of the world are come,' and the eyelids are a little weary. She is older than the rocks among which she sits," the haunting cadences go on to say; "like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants: and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of

Troy; and, as St. Anne, the Mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has molded the changing lineaments and tinged the eyelids and the hands. The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences, is an old one; and modern thought has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by and summing up in itself all modes of thought and life. Certainly Lady Lisa might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea."

It is at once the strength and the weakness of Mr. Johnson's play that it suggests not only this passage, but kindred pictures of the woman who holds in her cinder of a body, in her cinder of a soul, the experiences of the ages. It is its strength because the conception has an irresistible appeal to the imagination, a compelling poetry about it. It is its weakness because Mr. Johnson has sacrificed to his symbolism the keen, homely tang of reality. Even the other characters, as well as his heroine, are dramatized moods, theories, soul states, not beings of our common flesh and blood. Whether this results from an exaggerated effort after the symbolic — "The Comet" is Mr. Johnson's first play — or from a lack of interest in the characters as persons does not

greatly concern us. The fact remains. That his primary effort was not after reality is, however, plainly enough shown by the setting of the drama — in the Spanish Pyrenees. Obviously the characters are not Spanish, they belong to no nation. They are creatures of the author's brain. He put his scene where he did to remove it as far as possible from reality, doubtless in part influenced by the exotic personality of his star. "Magda," which the play inevitably suggests, is frankly and unmistakably German. Its feet are on solid ground. "The Comet" is not American. Its feet are not on solid ground. It lacks that homely touch of familiar domestic detail which would have helped it vastly in winning the understanding and interest of the average audience.

But had that touch been given it Mr. Johnson would then have had to face the task, more easy now from the very unreality of his setting, of making real this fantastic figure of a woman, this vision with the centuries in her sleepless eyes and a cinder for a soul. As she stands now, for all his efforts to make her carry a "message," to make her impressive as an illustration of certain theories of his regarding the artist ego, *Lona*, on the stage, is chiefly impressive for a certain picturesque quality, as of a metaphor come to life, for her suggestions to the imaginative beholder of dim

fables read long ago, of Poelike tales, of the face of the Lady Lisa, of horrible experiences and great spiritual adventures, not real and capable of bringing suffering to you in your theater chair but lived in a fantastic dream. She has the vagueness and the charm of allegory.

Now, without doubt, though Mr. Johnson intended some of this picturesqueness, he intended even more that *Lona* should be a fictional embodiment of such a type of woman artist as George Sand (to mention only the dead), who ate up Chopin and De Musset and even bore a child to satiate her lust for experience, and mounted on the dead soul of her, on her slain womanhood, to artistic heights. He meant *Lona* should be a very real person. But *Lona* does not impress the beholder as a real person nor is she surrounded by real persons nor does she move in a setting of reality. In so far as she does not, his drama may be said to be a failure, wherever the fault lies. But in so far as he yet contrives to create vividly and with well wrought episode the imaginative picture of a woman upon whose head "all the ends of the world are come," figurative and aloof though she be, he has done something fine, something out of the ordinary on our stage, something which should win for him praise and approval, not scorn and laugh-

ter. This *Lona* of his, this "woman of a thousand years, fleeing in the smoky dawn," personified by Nazimova and a wonderful gray gown with a wonderful tall collar, is, merely to look upon, merely to hear recite her horrible confession of her fall and her rise, an unforgettable thing, a thing to haunt you, to invade your dreams, to disturb your little illusions and the petty gratifications of your little loves and hates. Not to feel this, not to give Mr. Johnson the credit for it, is to do a gross injustice.

It is only fair to the author to state briefly what theories of life and conduct — for "The Comet" is a drama with a purpose — he intended to convey in his play. First, then, the drama hymns the exaltation of the artist over the individual. *Lona*, a George Sand type, believes that her soul is dead as the price of her greatness, and glories in that fact. The woman had first to die in her, she says, "because the woman would have to be a slave." (See G. B. Shaw, "The Revolutionist's Hand Book": "Home is the girl's prison and the woman's workhouse.") But nobody is ever quite dead, and so *Lona's* soul is roused by *Fernand's* young passion to be great and his appeal to her to help him. It is still a sort of artist's vision that she has — she will be the creator of *Fernand*; but it is a creative, not a

destructive instinct toward one of her fellows, and so marks a kind of regeneration in her. *Fernand* plainly enough is intended to convey the lesson that the artist who would interpret human nature must not judge, but understand. There is no dispute with this fine moral. "Father," he says, "what I have learned to-day has made me so humble that I would go and seek the most miserable outcast in the street to learn what she can teach me." So from scorn of the *Comet* he passes to the point of packing up to depart with her to "learn life." Finally *Cecilia*, the young sister of *Lona*, betrothed to *Fernand*, typifies the woman who sees no way to get experience but by attaching herself to a man, and when *Lona* takes *Fernand* away from her she is not so much broken-hearted as glad of the initiative which has been given her to "cross the seas" for herself. (Again see Shaw, as above.)

Now it would be perfectly easy to take most of the doctrines in this play and find sources for them in more or less recent literature. Startling novelty they do not have. "You wish a career, you said to climb, and you are going to put on your back a double burden," says *Lona* to *Fernand*, referring to his marriage. Literature is not lacking in this sort of thing. Kipling ends "The Story of the Gadsbys" with a poem, where he says that

"white hands cling to the tightened rein," and adds:

"Down to Gehenna or up to the throne,
He travels fastest who travels alone."

Shaw's preface to "Man and Superman," wherein he discusses the sex impulse and the artist impulse, is a source for this play; I do not say a conscious source, but a source none the less, for ideas that are in the air will surely get into the work of an earnest and scholarly young writer like Mr. Johnson. Professor Thomas's "Sex and Society" might have furnished another bit, *Lona's* speech, "The future is ours [i. e., woman's]; we have never gone back, all civilization and all society have changed as we have forced our way up." "Hedda Gabler" very palpably furnishes a dramatic device, that of making *Fernand* remain in the room with *Lona* to show his strength, just as *Loveberg* drank the punch. Even, of course, the idea of the woman who sums up in herself the experiences of a thousand years is not new to literature and speculation, if it is to the stage. "I'll make a legend of these old thoughts that young men begin with," *Fernand* exclaims. Well, Mr. Johnson has made a play!

However, it is not with sources that I would quarrel, nor with the fact that Mr. Johnson

does n't give the impression in his work of a thorough digestion of these ideas. It is with the fact that the ideas as he has used them are after all quite demonstrably false. George Sands there are, and it is wholly legitimate and entirely fascinating to show in a play. But to preach from her that through her way lies greatness in art, to use her as a symbol of the artist's vision, is to falsify the artistic achievement and debase the artist's vision. To say that the interpreter of humanity must understand, not judge, is fine and true. But to imply, as Mr. Johnson will seem to do in the eyes of his audiences, whether that was his intent or not, that in order to understand the woman of the gutter one must go down into the gutter with her is juvenile and absurd. Even the white hands clinging to the tightened rein is a theory too often exploded to have the force of law. The vagaries and varieties of the "artistic temperament" (Oh, perilous phrase!) are many and great. This temperament has produced monsters in order to produce masterpieces. But it has also produced the Brownings and such a host of other sane and noble men and women, who have lived at peace with society, their neighbors, and their wives, that no such attitude as Mr. Johnson's — which is not free from a taint of the Bohemian pose — is seriously representative of the artist soul.

Another quarrel there is, too, with his gratuitously unpleasant catastrophe. *Lona's* first false step, as Owen Davis would phrase it, had been taken eighteen years before the play begins, and *Fernand's* father had been the guilty man, though *Fernand* does not know it. After this long interval she comes back and is about to take his son away (there is something of Hawthorne's "Feathertop" here). The father, in a mad effort to stay his boy, all other means failing, cries out, "There is a law which even the beasts of the field obey, that father and son shall not share the same woman." Then the boy goes out and kills himself, and into *Lona's* eyes, which have begun to glow again with human warmth, comes the dead lustre of the burnt-out coal as the curtain falls. Of course, there is no such law, certainly not for "the beasts of the field." Mr. Johnson has never bred dogs. But if there were such a law, under the avowed philosophy of the play *Fernand* should have broken it. However, that is not the point. The objection is rather to the needless nastiness of the entire episode, savoring as it does of D'Annunzio. The structure of the play may demand it from the beginning, but then the structure of the play from the beginning is in need of revision. Mr. Johnson could have preached what he wants to preach quite as effectively

under conceivably different circumstances and avoided what is after all a taint. There is no desire on the part of the present writer to deny any man the right to his ideas and their full expression, to wave the moral bugaboo, to turn a deaf ear to any message, whether from archbishop or anarchist. In fact the anarchist is likely to get the more attentive audience! But this episode under discussion is no part of Mr. Johnson's message, only of his machinery. It is not essential to his philosophy, even deeply to his psychology, only to the arbitrary structure of his story. For that reason it is gratuitous and, in all kindness to Mr. Johnson, in bad taste.

Nazimova's portrayal of the cinder woman gives to the play more of popular appeal than its philosophy is ever likely to. Surely she is the living embodiment of *Fernand's* description, "a woman of a thousand years, fleeing in the smoky dawn." Surely the awakening of a spark in her burnt-out cinder of a soul is denoted with a vividness and certainty that are astonishing. And surely in her final and sudden collapse once more into a cinder the art of mere bodily pose and suggestion is seen at its very finest. That Nazimova's *Lona* is not a living, pulsating, mental organism, for all its dead soul, such a complicated being as Mr. Johnson probably had in mind to paint, is

true. It is a strange, fantastic vampire out of the realms of unreality, a dead thing met in dreams on the road of night, dead with its own weight of vague, shadowy experiences. But it comes across the footlights like a heavy odor, all the more strangely on that account. And until another actress has played the part it transcends criticism to say whether the effect is not inherent, after all, in the construction of the drama, itself unreal, a play of theories and passions, not persons. At any rate there they are, play and picture, something purpose-fraught and imaginative, and out of the ordinary to such a degree that they have been viewed and judged with a copious amount of misunderstanding, incomprehension and silly and stupid jeers. They may not be to your liking, but they are not to be merely laughed away. The thorns may crackle under the pot and the coins jingle in young Mr. George Cohan's pocket; but the author of "The Comet," if he is wise, will not let that trouble him in the least.

OF JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDE

(LYRIC, March 9, 1908)

ONCE upon a time a recruit in a regiment stationed at Peshawar, so we are told by Kenneth Grahame, applied for leave of absence "in order to attend to family matters of importance." Knowing that he would desert if the leave were not granted the colonel let him go. Presently he returned, subdued but cheerful. The colonel ventured to inquire if he had arranged matters in his family to his satisfaction. And he replied: "I got him from behind a rock."

There is something delightfully appealing about this primitive method of dealing out justice. It hardly accords with open plumbing, taxicabs, churches, piano players, police departments, Andrew Carnegie, and other appurtenances of modern civilization. But there come times to all of us, though we stand on the topmost rung of the ladder of evolution and look down in scorn on the Cave man, when, like the walrus, we "deeply sympathize." William Vaughn Moody's "little man in trousers, slightly jagged," advised quite pertinently that

"If nature made you graceful, don't get gay,
 Back-to before the hippopotamus:
 If meek and godly, find some place to play
 Besides right where three mad hyenas fuss:
 You may hear language that we won't discuss."

Often perhaps it's a relative; Kenneth Gra-
 hame preferred uncles; our own choice would
 be aunts. But often too it is n't a relative at
 all. There are various kinds of bores, and
 men who employ little children in factories,
 and assorted occupants of Circe's sty who
 bring dead cigars into street cars, or pursue
 women, or wear offensive dress waistcoats
 with brass buttons, — "They'd none of them
 be missed." But alas! convention doth make
 cowards of us all; and, like *Zerlina* in "*Don
 Giovanni*," we would, and yet we would not.
 We have not the courage of our convictions.
 The weight of the social order is heavy upon
 us, and we let our marked down victims live.
But Art is not reality, however hard it strives
 to be in the Belasco drama. In the theater we
 can indulge a sneaking satisfaction in the per-
 formance of deeds of slaughter that we should
 never dare do ourselves. We can be mad
 hyenas to our heart's content and not feel a
 bit the worse for it. In short, we can rejoice
 that *Rodion*, in Laurence Irving's play, "*The
 Fool Hath Said, There Is No God*," chopped
 old *Gromoff* up with an axe, knowing that it

served the old swine jolly well right; and we can not only refuse to be convinced that *Rodion* ever repented of his deed but actually hope that he did n't repent, without feeling that our sentiments fail to do us credit.

Now those of us who are doomed by birth and training to stagger through life under a Pilgrim's pack of Puritan conscience may experience, along with these sentiments, a vague presentiment that we ought to be ashamed of them, much like the small girl in the advertisement who is sure that a certain breakfast food is bad for her because it's so good! There must, we are confident, be something profoundly immoral about a play that makes of murder not a fine art, indeed, as De Quincey did, but a thing of moral beauty, of ethical satisfaction. For, mark you, this Fool who said in his heart there is no God, also said, "Moses gave the Ten Commandments; he did n't keep them." He was no fool, not he! In spite of the author's feeble efforts to convince us to the contrary in the last act, he was never converted. Poor little *Sonia's* trivial superstitions and pack of stale conventions that she called her religion could not impress such a mind as *Rodion's* except with pity. He gave himself up to the police that she might keep her faith, not because he had lost his. Or, if you object that he had no faith, his

doubts, then, for doubts sometimes represent a far deeper and more passionate capacity for religion, for the higher life, than any conformity to creed can do. And if he had acted from any other motive he would have seemed weak-kneed, a quitter. He was never sorry that he killed the old man, and neither are we. What, then, are we to think of such a play, a successful plea for the morality of murder? Should not the police be called in? This is worse than "Mrs. Warren's Profession"!

Well, some of us won't think anything at all about it, because the play as a story is, after the opening act or two, dull and monotonous. Nothing dull ever harmed anybody's morality. If virtue would only wear scarlet the world would be a better place at once! And some of the rest of us will think, "Lo, how difficult it is to write a good play."

For the real trouble with Laurence Irving's drama is that he dodges the issue, both the technical issue and the ethical, or the working out of his idea. It is the same old trouble. How countless many dramas have gone to ruin on the same reef! The lodestone mountain in "The Arabian Nights" never wrecked more ships. Perhaps the dramatists have too long bowed down before false gods, invoking Melpomene when it is the patron shade of a Jevons or a Hegel they should seek; authors

of dreary works on logic. Dreary, yes; but, oh, how indispensable! We talk of "the great, irregular art of Shakespeare" (or Pater does). As if there were ever anything more remorselessly logical than "Othello"! But we maintain with our patronage in the theater "Iris," and "Mrs. Dane's Defence," and "The Thief," plays that march their plot along with logical progression, each new step following out of the last, each step a part of the whole, but the whole not seen or realized till the parts have all been fitted. It is not the curse of "the well made play" that it follows this logical course, but that it does nothing more, that its whole is not worth the trouble.

Now, the technical problem in "The Fool Hath Said, There Is No God" was clearly stated in the first act. *Rodion* declared that the moral conviction of a man who commits a so-called crime for what he deems the good of humanity is a better weapon of defence against detection than the "nervous insensibility" of the true criminal. *Rodion* had moral conviction enough to reform Philadelphia, but he also had nervous sensibility enough to stagger Philadelphia's most famous specialist in that line, Dr. Weir Mitchell. The battle between his moral conviction and his tottering nerves, a purely subjective battle within himself, made material for the actor's

art — picturesque, and up to a certain point interesting material. But it did not make drama, which requires two wills, not one; and after a time these nervous fits, these physical collapses, grew deadly tiresome. The technical problem of the play was not really to picture them but to set *Rodion's* will against that of *Bezac*, the examining magistrate, to weave around this struggling captive an ever tightening net. And either from his desire to elaborate the stellar rôle, which caused him to dwell too much on the subjective emotions of *Rodion*, or from his inability logically to work out his problem with fertile invention, Mr. Irving fails to develop this situation step by step, to construct a drama that holds the attention in ever increasing grip.

In a word, *Bezac's* cross questionings do not hang together, do not lead each from each, do not close in about the victim. They are haphazard, scattered. To be sure, *Bezac* was supposedly baffled by *Rodion's* resistance; and cross-examiners before now, in life, have appeared to have no logical plan, to be questioning at random. But the drama is not life. There is not the same interest felt in the fate of a fictitious character as in the fate of a living man, however humble he may be. A drama to maintain its interest must concentrate, must develop, must move by accumu-

lated force. Compare the big act of "The Hypocrites," where the preacher is driven step by step into an ever more hopeless position, to be released only at the final moment, or of "Mrs. Dane's Defence," where the lawyer, by question after question, slowly, relentlessly, inevitably, backs his victim up a blind alley against the dead wall of a confession, with the fourth act of Mr. Irving's play and the difference will at once be seen. That Mr. Irving realized his problem is evident from *Rodion's* final "I —, I —," interrupted just in time by the false confession of the workman. But this is a trick, a mere theatrical trick; and it comes at the very end of an act without development or suspense, too late to save it.

But Mr. Irving no less surely dodged his ethical issue, failed to follow the logical development of the idea behind his play.

"I was my own spider," says the hero of one of Turgénieff's novels. "We Russians have no other life problem," he goes on, "than the cultivation of our personality! . . . Without having received from within any definite direction, in reality respecting nothing, believing firmly in nothing, we are free to make of ourselves whatsoever we will. . . . On the other hand, we are great psychologists. Oh, yes, we are great psychologists! But our psychology strays off into pathology; our psy-

chology is an artful study of the laws of a diseased condition and a diseased development, with which healthy people have no concern. But the chief thing is, we are not young — in youth itself we are not young!”

Sad words, these; yet how true a description of *Rodion*! He was his own spider, caught in the meshes of his wild, anarchistic, humanitarian theory of justifiable homicide. His brooding, introspective psychology was but pathology too; and surely he was never young; that thin, haggard face of his, a face full of fruitless passions, the scarred battleground of intellectual rebellions, which Mr. Sothorn made manifest, never knew the smile of careless youth. But why, *why* was he never young? How make him young again? How free him from the web his own fate had spun? How set him right with the social order? That was the intellectual problem of the play — a splendid problem, worthy of the highest powers.

And this is how the author answered it! He told *Rodion* that murder revenges itself not on the conscience but the nervous system. And he tried to tell us that the prattling prayers of an ignorant girl and her mummeries before an ikon are sufficient to solve the intellectual doubts of a man who is seeking with his own hand to redress terrible wrongs that seem

to him woven in the texture of the universe. In the name of the Prophet, figs! The best play that was ever written, to be sure, is not an answer to any problem. For a play deals with individual men and women, and it is only by the collection of large numbers of individual cases that anything like a law, a solution of a problem, can be arrived at. Yet if a play is to be of the slightest value, even as one in a collection, it must be made of different stuff than this. Mr. Irving is in the ridiculous position of the man who used to answer the arguments of an evolutionist by quoting the book of Genesis.

So we swing around through seriousness seriously to consider the absurdities of our opening paragraphs. For, horrible as murder is, greatly as it violates our civilized instincts, there is not the slightest doubt that Mr. Irving meant his audiences to sympathize with *Rodion* in the murder of *Gromoff*; there is not the slightest doubt that the audiences do sympathize, are perfectly satisfied to see the old swine killed. There are warring instincts in us too, the mad hyena heart beating beneath the boiled shirt bosom, the right of the individual rebelling against the might of society. Do we not still talk of "the unwritten law"? *Rodion*, a Russian, saw human life held as anything but sacred by the Government and the institu-

tions about him. When conventional religion quoted to him the Decalogue, he replied that Moses slew the Egyptian. Even his friends agreed that old *Gromoff* deserved to die; it was only after they had seen the body, only under the physical repugnance at a bloody corpse, that the idea of his murder became horrible to them. That is a good deal like saying, Thou shalt not kill because it is n't pretty. All our centuries of struggle up from the primeval ooze have accomplished but little if that is the best answer we can give.

Rodion was at odds with society. And it was only by the social argument that he could be answered. Little *Sonia* lisped, as she had been taught to do, that our lives are given to us by God, without the slightest conception of what she meant. And though she recoiled from *Rodion* before he gave himself up, she was perfectly ready to marry him after he'd served his time in Siberia — as if that made any difference! A far deeper and far more searching answer must be given — and rightly given — to convince a Russian revolutionist. Perhaps he must needs be taken up on an exceeding high mountain and shown all the kingdoms of this earth, the webs of our destinies interlaced, the consequences of our individual acts going far down into ourselves, but also far out to infinite space, involving others as

they go. Even then the task of answering him will not be easy, for his poor mind has been cruelly warped and blistered by oppression. It was a task quite too much for Laurence Irving. He could convince us that old *Gromoff* was a swine, but he could not convince *Rodion* that he had no right to kill him. He could not adequately meet his moral issue.

And it makes not the slightest difference whether the faults of his play are the faults of Dostoieffski's novel, "Crime and Punishment," or not. It was his business to make a drama, not to photograph a book. As a matter of fact the book is at once a minute picture of Russian life and a minute study in morbid psychology; it is not dramatic, and it differs materially in incident from the play. It need not be considered here at all. Mr. Irving's drama is not likely to occupy a very prominent place in Mr. Sothern's répertoire, though he will possibly continue to present it now and then. For if it has failed as a play it has not failed as a means of showing the actor in a new and striking impersonation, one that marks a broadening of his scope, a deepening of his powers. It was *Rodion's* theory that the moral conviction of the man who murders for love of Humanity is a stronger asset against detection than the nervous insensibility

of the real criminal. Mr. Sothern was called upon to suggest, then, the sufferings and the mental conditions of a high-strung, intensely nervous young man who has done a physically horrible thing which has shattered all the lower centers of his being, while the higher centers — his will and his moral sense — remain untouched. It was a curious and a fascinating problem the actor faced, and he met it resourcefully and well. The quivering nerves, the tortured imaginings, the ordinary processes of thought and suggestion completely overthrown by what he had done he suggested with almost painful fidelity. He seemed always trembling on the verge of collapse, almost tortured beyond endurance. And yet he suggested, also, the indomitable will and fiery purpose of this young idealist, the splendid heart below the querulous outbreaks of nervous passion and the bloody deed; the fighting intellect, too, that resisted the Magistrate till the last. In his *Malvolio*, Mr. Sothern showed the rare ability he possesses of suggesting, beneath an exterior however grotesque, an innate nobility. Again, as *Lord Dundreary*, the gentleman behind the "silly ass" was never quite lost to sight. The outer aspect of both these characters is comic. The outer aspect of *Rodion* is tragic. Mr. Sothern has shown that he can sustain both aspects on a plane of

splendid dignity. And as *Rodion* his expenditure of obvious method was less than it has ever been before, his art more artless. It is a long road from Zenda to modern St. Petersburg. Our hats should go off to the actor who, in defiance of profits, has made the journey.

OUR LEADING ACTOR

THE attempts to place the late Richard Mansfield in a fixed artistic position ought to be a sufficient warning against that sort of criticism. He was the greatest actor in America; he was the worst actor in America. And one critic, dodging the issue, announced that there were three kinds of actors, good, bad, and Richard Mansfield. Yet there is an eternal fascination to the human mind in putting people into niches, in weighing genius in a balance and placing a tag upon it. Heine said: "Nothing is more foolish than the query, Which poet is greater than the other? Flame is flame and its weight cannot be determined in pounds and ounces. Only a narrow, shopkeeper mind will attempt to weigh genius in its miserable cheese scales." But Heine said this just after he had remarked that Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Goethe were the great triumvirate of poets! And since the deaths of Joseph Jefferson and Richard Mansfield it has occurred to many people to inquire, Who is our leading actor? Probably if a vote could be taken on such a question public choice would fall on E. H. Sothorn, who has for many years

been universally popular and who has more recently devoted a large share of his energies to what is best and finest in the drama. At the risk of weighing genius in our cheese scales let us see what claims Mr. Sothern has to this proud eminence.

In pessimistic moments perhaps it seems as if his chief claim were based on the fact that there are so few to dispute the pedestal with him. David Warfield, Henry Miller, Otis Skinner, Robert B. Mantell? These, but who else? Difficult as it is to express satisfactorily in words, we all have a pretty definite conception in our minds of that peculiar quality in an actor which raises him above his fellows and makes him the master of our emotions. It is an ease and certainty of technique; it is a fluency and largeness of voice and manner; it is a comfortable assurance of power in reserve and the ability to meet whatever demands may arise; and, comprising, yet going beyond these things, it is a personal sincerity and eloquence, a sense of the man behind the mask, of a mind and heart large, energetic, purposeful and strong. Personality in this sense is a far different thing from the "personality" of the young player who trades on a pretty face or a pleasant smile; and it can no more be divorced from acting than from any other branch of art, or from life itself. And, judged

by this conception of greatness, the pedestal of preëminence would surely not be overcrowded were we to place all Mr. Sothern's rivals upon it, beside him. The group would not resemble the hosts of Artaxerxes. However, as each of his rivals seems lacking in one or more of the qualities that go to make up Mr. Sothern's artistic equipment, perhaps it is only fair to give him the benefit of his versatility, and if possible his lone place at the top of the group. He would be the last to want this position if he did not deserve it, and the last to intimate that the way was barred to any other to reach a place by his side. If certain of his rivals could widen their répertoires and give rein to their own artistic impulses instead of dwelling year in and year out with a single part or two, his place, even to-day, might be far less secure.

Comparisons are odorous chiefly to super-sensitive noses. Mr. Warfield and his real friends will not smell out offence in the statement that until he has played a larger number and a wider range of parts than *Levi*, *Von Barwig* and *Wes' Bigelow* his position must remain below Mr. Sothern's. Granville Barker, during a trip to New York to decide that he did n't want to be director of the New Theater, visited the Stuyvesant Theater and came away to talk about "Warfield's marvelous technique." It is marvelous. Within the narrow

bounds of the characters he has so far played it seems almost flawless. And no acting on our stage to-day can compare with Mr. Warfield's for immediate emotional effect. But does Mr. Warfield create the impression of an amplitude of power sufficient to compass other and more poetic, more imaginative, more intellectual rôles? Perfect as he is in his genre, has he yet demonstrated the larger gifts to give us a figure like *Don Quixote*? Hardly. After he has played *Shylock* (and his *Shylock* is going to restore a fund of comedy to the old play that will be a revelation, unless all signs fail) perhaps Mr. Warfield's name will have to be written larger. That is everybody's hope.

Henry Miller's contribution to the contemporary stage has been of late rather stage management than acting. Not to forget his very human and illuminating performance as *Stephen Ghent*, the total effect of "The Great Divide" was more striking than any single performance in it. The ensemble of "The Servant in the House" is another triumph for his skill. In this generation, when a system that boasts it has put our theater "on a business basis" has in fifteen years been unable to discover or train a single stage manager worthy of the name, such a genius as Mr. Miller's is not lightly to be passed over. A

good stage manager needs imagination quite as much as the actor, and imagination of a wider and more comprehensive kind, to see not one part, but all parts, to dream the structure out of the blocks. Mr. Miller is, indeed, so good a stage manager that he realizes better than any of our players, save Mrs. Fiske, how much the spirit of the stage has changed, how now the good actor is *representative*, a medium for the author's meaning, not a figure to strut impressively in the lime-light. Mr. Miller is putting on good plays, and putting them on well, putting them on better, in fact, than any other manager. Just now, in an age when ignorant vulgarians dominate our stage from their Broadway business offices Mr. Miller's influence for good can hardly be overestimated. But in the present instance we are estimating acting only, not stage management; and as an actor, Henry Miller surely lacks something of the charm and grace that Mr. Sothern commands.

If exuberant vitality and ease, grace and fluency of diction were the sole test, Otis Skinner would easily carry off the palm. How much Mr. Sothern's *Hamlet* would gain by the other man's sheer physical vitality in a climax and his triumphant elocution! There is promise, too, in Mr. Skinner's past. In Bowker's "Francesca" he was a figure

to be remembered. There is never any doubt of his reserve power or his fund of resourceful technique. And he has a mind of no common order. Yet Mr. Skinner comes to us year after year always in a new play — one play, and not always a good play. He has for us no *répertoire*, no characters peculiarly and affectionately associated with himself. That is partly our fault, for we have been altogether too long, in New York at any rate, in appreciating Otis Skinner at his real value. No actor, whether his own manager or not, can afford the productions and company for a *répertoire* unless his public following is extensive. Mr. Skinner and his manager promise better things for him in the future. But at present his leadership is not complete.

Robert B. Mantell is conserving "the classic *répertoire*." Dear old "classic *répertoire*," thrice blessed, admired, never to be too much praised, tiresome old "classic *répertoire*," how many crimes have been committed in thy name! For it is a crime to be dull; it is the one artistic sin for which there is no forgiveness nor a drop of water in hell. Many a playwright down below sits on a red hot stove reading his own dull plays while a little devil prods him with especial good will to keep him awake. And some of these playwrights bear names not unknown to the text-books. Yet

somebody has got to conserve the "classic répertoire." Aye, as long as the race shall last that répertoire must be kept alive; say what we will, think what we will, deeper than speech or thought in us is an instinct which demands it. And just now we are offering up Mr. Mantell on the altar of our instinct. We ought to be grateful. Probably we are. Mr. Mantell has a fine voice and a big presence and a grasp on the traditional requirements and means of expression of the "classic répertoire." He is doing his task admirably. But there is a drama of to-day and of to-morrow that interests us. A leader must know of that drama too, must interpret and shape it for us.

There is one actor who does, and she is an actress — Mrs. Fiske. Easily the foremost of our women players, everything that can be done with the head she does, and some things that the head cannot do. Her *Tess*, her *Becky Sharp*, her *Hedda Gabler* were figures that will live in the memory of those who saw them as long as life lasts. It may be her appeal is too dominantly intellectual to command the widest public following; but a wide following is not always essential for a leader. Certainly Mrs. Fiske, both as actress and producer, fighting against heavy odds, has been a pioneer, has warred on the side of progress, has done as much as any other single person in

the American theater to keep our standards up above the dust of dollars where the Powers that produce forever strive to drag them. Mrs. Fiske has done a man's work in our theater, and done it better than most men; which is humbly submitted to the Suffragettes for an argument! But still we cannot quite bring ourselves to the point of making a hard and fast comparison between an actress and an actor, of weighing *Tess* and *Don Quixote* in the same cheese scales. Something still inheres in the masculine art of more dominant power, if not of more perfect workmanship, that makes us turn instinctively to it for leadership, and forbids the comparison. Is this a shocking confession? None the less it must stand.

So we come to E. H. Sothern, who lingered in New York to produce "*Don Quixote*" at great expense when he might have been playing "*Dundreary*" on the road to \$16,000 a week. (Indeed, his last week of "*Dundreary*" in Boston brought him \$20,000.) One of those neat little critical bromides is, "Mr. Sothern is essentially a comedian." Mr. Sothern is essentially a conscientious and painstaking and ambitious artist. In the days of "*Zenda*" and "*An Enemy of the King*," when a thousand girlish hearts beat high at every matinée and sweet young things averred

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that they "could die listening to Sothern say 'Darling!'" it was perhaps fortunate for him that he was a comedian. He escaped a tragedy. He weathered the perils of picture book romance and rode out upon the great, deep sea of "Hamlet." Then came the engagement with Miss Marlowe, which bettered his elocution, as an engagement with Miss Marlowe must do for any player, and widened the field for his achievement and ambition. Since then Mr. Sothern has shown no sign of pausing and his acting has steadily deepened in truth and power. His *Hamlet* has mellowed, grown sweeter, graver, more thoughtful and more elastic in its lighter moods. There are touches of poetry in his *Villon* that were not there five years ago. And in his newer parts, even when the plays have failed, he has disclosed new powers as an actor.

As *Rodion* in "The Fool Hath Said, There is no God," he was called on to suggest a mental struggle, a tortured mind in combat with an iron will. And he suggested it surely, vividly, and without the sense of effort that has sometimes been apparent in his acting. And he turned from the comic absurdities of *Dundreary* to do this thing. As *Don Quixote* he had a more difficult task, that of making plausible and appealing in the flesh one of the greatest figures in literature,

a figure already created in the imagination of his audience and set in a place apart. To perform this task required imagination of him and a fine understanding of Cervantes's Knight, and eloquence and technique. He struck the right note at once with his make-up, the lean, pathetic, middle-aged figure, the wild, bright, vision-haunted eyes, the hollow cheeks — at once grotesque and sad. And through all the comic absurdities of the part and the farcical episodes of the play he never for one instant offended the lover of Cervantes's Sorrowful Knight, because his *Don* never for one instant lost his pathetic dignity, his chivalrous bearing born of a beautiful and chivalrous soul. There are times in life when you laugh at Cervantes's book; there are other times when you weep. At moments of Mr. Sothern's performance you know both moods — when he accepts the Duke's ironic invitation with a sweet courtesy Mallory might have envied, when he sits dejected in his cage, "a captured eagle," the scoffers cry, but how much more like a captured eagle than they guess!

There is hardly a passage in all literature, unless it be the parting of Launcelot and Guenever in Mallory, to equal for pure pathos the overthrow of Don Quixote by the Knight of the Silver Moon. "Dulcinea is the fairest woman in the world, and I the unhappiest

knight on earth; but it is not meet that my weakness should disown this truth. Strike with your lance, Sir Knight!" For some strange reason, in the play it was not the Knight of the Silver Moon who vanquished the *Don*. His shield bore red crosses, like a package of surgeon's plaster. And it was inevitable that the pathos be less poignant. Yet Mr. Sothern's cry, "*Dulcinea* is the fairest woman in the world!" rose faintly above the stage hubbub with a stab of eloquence, and the essential meaning, the tragedy and poetry of the overthrow were borne home to every heart, though everything till then had been but farce to many in the audience. The capacity to achieve an effect like that belongs only to the few. It stamps its possessor as a leader.

Mr. Sothern's repertoire during the season of 1907-8 included "Hamlet," a Shakespearian classic; "Lord Dundreary," a specimen of early mid-Victorian drama and a monument to his father; "If I Were King," a modern romantic play; "The Fool Hath Said," a psychological drama; and "Don Quixote," an attempt by an American playwright, Paul Kester, to give stage life to a great figure of world literature. He staged all these plays himself, sufficiently sumptuously and with intelligent feeling for their different atmospheres and demands. To present them all he

had to train and maintain a large company, at considerable expense. That Mr. Sothern's acting is without faults or that it realizes to the full his own or his critics' ideal nobody will maintain. He still tends always to drag his tempo. He still falls into his old tricks now and then of recurring over-emphasis, producing an artificial and monotonous effect. He still lacks sometimes what seems almost a physical vitality to master a climax or sweep a speech up to the point of emotional discharge. You have that indescribable feeling inside of you as you listen of something rising, rising, rising, and not quite getting there — an uncomfortable feeling of *almost*. But he is an actor whose command of his art is constantly growing, whose devotion to it, and to the best in the drama, is deep, vigilant, and sincere, and whose répertoire and achievement are already wider, more varied and more stimulating to all classes than that of any other American actor. The best that we can wish for him and for ourselves is that he may have to fight perpetually to maintain his leadership.

FALLING IN LOVE WITH ONE'S WIFE

(EMPIRE, August 31, 1907)

IT all happened because *Mme. Dupré* did n't read the "Ladies' Home Journal." Had she done so she would have known that there are certain things all young girls should know, preferably from the lips of their mothers. And thus enlightened, little *Trixie Dupré* would hardly have entered into the matrimonial state with her guardian, *Gerald Eversleigh*, so lightly, nor been so willing to go into a dark room for developing purposes with *M. Valboure* (was there not a pun in the French original?) nor otherwise comported herself in a manner rather hard to reconcile even with an age before apples were a table fruit. As Cayley Drummle told Tanqueray, "Of all forms of innocence, mere ignorance is the least admirable." Certainly, seriously considered, "My Wife," an adaptation from the French of Gavault and Charnay, by Michael Morton, and shown for the first time in America at the Empire Theater by John Drew, tends to prove Cayley entirely in the right.

However, nobody but a moralist would seriously consider this Britonized ebullition of the French sense of humor. It is a pretty safe guess that in the original *Trixie's* blind innocence of ignorance was taken for granted as a working hypothesis (it was pragmatically true, because it worked well in the play, to be learned in the advanced philosophy!). And, in the original, doubtless the fun of the piece was largely drawn from the efforts of the *Gerald* of the English version to keep his ward away from his mistress; and later from her naïve betrayals of her ignorance of the meaning of matrimony. Readers of Guy de Maupassant know that French literature is quite capable of extracting humor from this sort of thing, and though the English adapter has converted the mistress into an actress of passable propriety and toned down the naïve betrayals of *Trixie* into the least compass possible, his plot still rests on *Trixie's* ignorance, and we must do him the kindness to grant him his hypotheses. Some literal-minded souls will still fail to find it shriekingly funny that a girl of eighteen, even though she has been brought up in France, can have been married a month without realizing the oddity in the world's eyes of separate suites or the impropriety of showing ardent letters from a lover. But why worry

over the literal-minded? They do enough worrying themselves, goodness knows!

Granted *Trixie's* innocence, then, and here is what happened in the English version: *Trixie Dupré*, aged eighteen, had to be married within six weeks or lose a fortune left by an old maid aunt. *Dupré père* wished her to marry So and So, but she loved *René Falandres*, whom *Père Dupré* did not approve. So she came to her guardian's flat, while he was entertaining an actress at supper, with a plan of action. It was no less than a marriage with this guardian, *Gerald Eversleigh* (a confirmed London bachelor), to be annulled by divorce when *René* returned from a trip to foreign parts. That would save the fortune and give her *René* as well. *Gerald* finally was forced into acceding to her weird proposal, and the second act shows them in a Swiss hotel on their "honeymoon." Here *Trixie* carries on with every man in sight, to the demolition of her husband's British dignity, forces him into a duel, and when *Père* and *Mère Dupré* finally arrive on the scene gives the whole scheme away by naïvely sympathizing with her husband because he has no view of Mount Blanc from his chamber window. That sends *Gerald* back to London in disgust, leaving the girl with her parents.

But her parents then forsake her too, so she

flies to *Gerald* just as he has another of those nice little dinners arranged, so dear to every bachelor, as every playgoer knows. *Gerald*, forgetting that he is really but holding her in trust for *René* (they did these things better in the old Welsh days; see book one of the *Mabinogion*), finds he loves her after all, and kisses her for the first time on the mouth. He has fallen in love with his own wife, which seems always to be an hilarious idea in the French drama. *René* comes back, and in an amusing scene where each man entirely misunderstands the other finally manages to make it known that his heart has changed: he met a new love in Morocco, to be precise (again we recall *Maupassant*), so there is no divorce, and presumably *Gerald* eventually sees Mount Blanc.

Such is the story, a Gallic morsel of farce, flimsy, unreal, with much of its fun inevitably gone. Probably even in France much depended on the actors; here, much more depended on them. In London, it is said, the required crispness, speed and verve were imparted, and the rôle of *Gibby*, friend of *Gerald*, a stupid, sleepy-headed, good-hearted young nobleman, something between a silly ass and a musical comedy Tom Pinch, was played by an artist who made it stand up above the others and kept the house in a roar. But this conception of

the part was too much for Ferdinand Gottschalk, who played it in his usual fussy, eccentric manner, not at all suggestive of nobility, and rather more of insolence than indolence. He was amusing at times; but then again at times he was n't, and those times stuck out. Miss Billie Burke, a little English ingénue imported to play *Trixie*, displayed the dearest profile on Broadway, but a very monotonous and sophisticated imitation of innocence. Possibly nobody could play the part with complete satisfaction after her sixth year. As for the rest of the cast, they labored ponderously where speed, crispness, the Gallic Touch, was their only salvation. Mr. Drew himself, of course, as *Gerald*, is much too expert an actor thus to err. He was crisp, polished, effective; he carried the climaxes single handed. He was the jolly bachelor, he was the indignant husband, finally he was the almost ardent lover. It is always a bit hard for Mr. Drew to be ardent in a play — and "My Wife" is only a farce, after all. But he labored in rather a barren vineyard. His talents are worthy a more significant vehicle, and there were moments on the stage when he could be fancied as thinking so, too.

CURING A PESSIMIST

(LYRIC, September 16, 1907)

"The drama was supposed to be written in blank verse, that is, good, wholesome, commonplace language the wrong end foremost, after the manner of Sheridan Knowles."

[From "Thirty Years passed among the Players," by Joe Cowell, Comedian: New York, 1844.]

WE met our friend the Pessimist, who usually has a grouch on the capacities of the dramatic form, and he was smiling blandly.

"What is this?" we cried. "An accident?"

"Oh," said he, "one cannot remain pessimistic all the time, even in a community of optimists! Besides, I've seen James O'Neill's revival of 'Virginius.'"

"And that makes you more hopeful about the stage?"

"Infinitely," he answered, "infinitely. I am always more hopeful of the future when I get a good dose of the past. That makes you sure history can't repeat itself; it could do nothing so bad again. Did it ever strike you that Darwin ought to have been the most cheerful of men? He was confident of the infinite inferi-

ority of his ancestors, and did n't pretend to like Shakespeare."

"Come, come," said we, "leave that latter pose to G. B. S."

The Pessimist shrugged his shoulders. "As you like," he said, "though I don't see why he should have the enjoyment of it all to himself. It's rather a nice pose, a kind of literary blasphemy that helps the soul a whole lot. But will you?"

He pointed toward a door. We would, so he led the way, and after he had shaken hands with a press agent and nodded to an actor and spoken a word well understood by the waiter, qualified by the adjective "two," he pointed to a portrait of Forrest on the wall, then brought his fist down on the table and forthwith delivered himself of the following remarkable discourse. We set it down as nearly as possible verbatim. A phrase here and there may be our own, to cover a slip in memory, and there were interruptions caused by the recurring visitations of the waiter which are not indicated. In substance, however, what he said may here be found, though without, alas! the peculiar nasal twang of his utterance in excited moments, an outcropping, we suspect, of New England ancestry.

"You see that man Forrest?" he began. "What do you suppose his effect would be on

an audience to-day if he came back in his old répertoire? Dickens once remarked on the pattern of Macready's waistcoat, 'such a happy combination is not likely to occur again.' Probably not; styles have changed in waistcoats. When Joseph Kilgour appeared in 'The Movers' with a pink one the stage manager had a fit and the audience tittered with derisive mirth. But would Macready's acting be any less out of date than his waistcoat? Some things about it, I grant you, would be fresh and true — enunciation, vocal technique, imagination, the unified conception of character that subordinates all details to the central idea, all that belongs to the art of acting everywhere for all time. But the old school lung power standard for heroism, how would that strike us now? As ridiculous, I tell you, simply ridiculous! You remember how Kean used to terrify even the members of his company by the indescribable violence of his performance as *Shylock*, and how Macready before he went on for *Shylock's* great scene would brandish a heavy ladder in the wings, uttering oaths meanwhile, to work himself up into a state of panting rage. These old actors used to grasp their audiences by the scruff of the neck and haul them up into a pitch of emotional excitement. To be heroic was to appear six feet tall, with a distorted face and the voice of a mad

megaphone. Tragedy was all fire and thunder and reverberating blank verse. They did n't impersonate human beings, these men — they impersonated volcanic eruptions: Edwin Forrest played Vesuvius, not *Virginius*. And shall we suppose that we change our style of waistcoat but go right on being contented with the same old style of dramatic wear, which is so much more important?"

Here we interrupted. "Is it so much more important?" we inquired. "The stage is but amusement, while our waistcoats ——"

"Piffle!" said the Pessimist, "you're going to quote Carlyle, and I won't stand it! Under every waistcoat beats a heart, and behind every drama and every piece of acting there ought to be an idea, the idea of representing life truly, sanely, helpfully. Now, there's just one way to do that, either for dramatist or actor — he must follow the fashion of his time. As Pinero, in an address on Stevenson as a dramatist, remarked, there's at least one sure rule in playmaking, you cannot pour new wine into old bottles. 'Virginius,' for instance, is a busted old bottle. It won't hold wine. If somebody should write a play to-day just like 'Virginius,' every bit as good of its kind, nobody would go to see it, because for us it would n't be life, it would be hopelessly stilted, artificial. And if some actor should arise to

play it in the good old 'heroic' fashion he would move nobody except, perhaps, some old chap who lingers into the Twentieth Century from ante-bellum days, because now we do not accept such acting as a representation of life; so how can we be expected to get human emotions from beholding it?

"Where are the dramas of the Eighteenth Century? Just three of them, one by Goldsmith and two by Sheridan, have survived on the boards. Where are the dramas of the first half of the Nineteenth Century? Go and see 'Virginus,' smell the mould upon it and you will be answered. Where are the 'bread and butter' plays of Robertson, those plays that swept the English stage like wildfire forty years ago, made Lady Bancroft famous and buried a bread knife in the heart of the bombast drama which had preceded them? Dead, all dead. 'Caste' and 'School' and the rest of them would seem as artificial to us to-day almost as 'Virginus.' An old Norwegian with whiskers, pacing up and down till he wore a path in the carpet planning how he could write a play without a soliloquy, how he could put life on the stage not half way but wholly, not conventionally but significantly, how he could make the drama speak as much with the voice of authority as the novel or the poem, did that! Yes, he did that, and the English critics

crucified him, or tried to, when he got translated into their language. But it was too late. The new bottle was made, the new wine of the modern world went into it, and that is where we go now for our drink. Waiter, the same again!

"Oh, I don't mean," he continued, "that only the plays of his Whiskers are worth while, or that all plays now must treat of his subject matter. The world is wide and wherever three are gathered together ——"

"One of them a woman?" we interjected.

"As you like! Wherever three are gathered together there is a possible drama. What I do mean is that to this modern world the forms and fashions of other days on the stage have no reality, so that a play cast in their mould now has no reality for us and any acting in it, however fine according to the old standards or the new, will leave us cold and unmoved. This talk about fine acting as if it were something that can be divorced from the play makes me tired. Suppose Sembrich at her recital should sing 'Waltz Me Around Again, Willie,' in her very best voice, with all her exquisite vocal art, would you thrill with emotion? You might (if you knew enough about singing) admire intellectually her vocal skill, but you would wait for 'The Miller and the Brook,' or 'The Nut Tree' for an emotion. Why should we

assume that acting can be effective or worth while in a play which is not true?

"I'll tell you why, because some of us are still children in the theater. We lay aside with our wraps everything but our 'primitive credulity' and tend to swallow whatever is set before us without question. We like this or that player instinctively for his personality. We are absorbed in the story the play tells, and what the story is, how it is told, whether true or false, probable or improbable, matters very little. That is why Shakespeare, who has lived because of his truth of characterization and his masterly skill in developing his plots from this characterization, was in his own day regarded by a public hungry for a story as no better perhaps than his contemporaries. That is why 'Virginius' could be hailed as a great tragedy in verse almost at the very hour when Keats and Shelley were making themselves immortal. That is why to-day a string of rubbish, false, absurd, silly, like 'Nancy Brown of Harvard' can attract big audiences and only in the vicinity of Cambridge a vegetable. Harry Woodruff lies on his stomach under a property elm reading a book and the dear girls go into ecstasies. The play tells a false, foolish story and the dear public who have n't been to college swallow it with the ready faith of children listening to a nursery rhyme. Is it

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possible that a second jump into a bramble bush will not restore the wise man's optics? Of course it isn't! What an absurd idea!"

"Still we're not all like that, you know," we put in timidly.

"Of course we're not, of course we're not!" shouted the Pessimist. "Did n't you catch me smiling? Do you suppose I'd smile if we were? Did n't the public forty years ago wake up and hail Robertson? Why? Because they saw real doors and windows, real bread and butter, real cups and saucers on the stage, and people that were almost real too, who talked almost real language and had almost real emotions. Then at last the audiences began to have almost real emotions also. It was pretty shallow reality, but people none the less began to suspect that the stage, instead of being something apart from life, could be a picture of and commentary upon it. The lung power tragedian heard his death knell. Audiences had begun to use their brains. Did n't Irving himself, though he arose with the torch of Macready, have to find for himself a new style of expression to fit the new ideas until he almost revived dead dramas by his living way of playing them? No, sir; as soon as the public began to reflect on the manner of telling the story there was revolution all along the

line. It was like turning Darwin loose in an old time camp meeting.

“And the good work has gone steadily and hopefully on. To-day a fair portion of the public not only reflects on the manner of telling a story but even on the matter of it. Some of us are getting almost grown up. Sometimes the story actually interests us less than the people in it; than the idea behind it. What do these people think and feel, why do they act as they do? First we insist that to win our sympathies at all they shall speak in our idiom, live and move in the understandable atmosphere of our time, be real to us as life itself is real to us. And after that, after we have accepted them as human beings whom we can comprehend, whose doubts and fears and joys and sorrows are like our own, or what our own might conceivably be, after, in short, we have been put in a state where the communication of emotion from the actors to us is possible, we watch their development through the drama, we watch and feel with them as we would with our friends. It is not so much now what they are doing as how they are doing it and how they are developing under the strain for better or worse that holds our attention and makes the playwright's fame as an author worthy of serious attention. No false heroics, no strut and platform eloquence,

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no world of the theater unlike anything in life is possible to-day if the dramatist would win the worthiest part of the public. He can make no false steps, interject no soliloquies to help his tale along, rely on no vocal splurges, no trite conventions. He must be unrelentingly true to the life and ideas of his times. The hero to-day is not the figure in a tunic or glittering mail who can raise a chest tone to the galleries and shatter a chandelier. He is the man who, like one of us in voice and dress and mode of life, in inherited ideas and conventional environment, yet unlike us, dares listen to his own soul and follow its voice through thick and thin. The hero of the stage to-day who can win our sympathies and thrill our hearts and lift us up to the heights is not *Virginius*, but *Dr. Thomas Stockmann*."

"That's pure, unadulterated Shaw," said we.

"Is it?" said the Pessimist. "Well, I dare to be in the right, even with Shaw! Have you the audacity to tell me that you can go to 'Virginius' after seeing 'The Great Divide' without a positive revulsion of feeling, a cringing of your perceptive faculties away from such a travesty of life? Have you the audacity to tell me that after suffering with that man and that woman in Mr. Moody's play, after trying to plunge to their motives, after straining to

readjust your outlook on life to meet the new problems they present, you can raise one little tear for *Virginus* and his fool daughter, you can find one glimmer of interest? Have you the audacity to tell me that after listening to the vivid, nervous, condensed, lifelike speech of Mr. Moody's characters you can listen with any patience to the bombastic, iambic prose of ———."

"Hold on," we cried, stung by his tone. "We tell you nothing of the kind. You've not given us a chance to say a word anyhow."

"Very good, don't," said he. "Now I'm not saying that the drama of the future will be thus or thus. Maybe our best to-day will be as artificial and old fashioned in thirty years as 'Caste' is now. I'm only saying that it's what it is to-day, and being what it is the man who writes plays and the man who acts them has got to accept it if he wishes to hold our attention, win our sympathies, stir our emotions. The man who revives Sheridan Knowles, the man who tries to act like Macready, the man who writes a modern play in the style of other days is doomed to failure. He is pouring new wine into old bottles. He is wasting precious juice. We still have horse cars in New York and we still have plays equally anachronous. They both pay too. But their days are numbered. This is the age of

electricity and Truth. The stage has got to measure up to reality if it wants to hold the attention of thinking men and women. In the drama, as in religion, the dear old days of 'primitive credulity' are numbered."

"What about the poetic drama?" we inquired timidly.

"What about it? Who said anything about it?" he cried, reaching for the check. "We were talking about 'Virgilius.'"

KISSES AND DAVID BELASCO

(BELASCO, December 3, 1907)

ONCE it was a bed, now it is a kiss, that Mr. Belasco cannot get along without in his dramas. Having discovered that beds are also used to sleep upon, the Wizard has discarded them from his list of theatrical properties, and adopted kisses. The Belasco kiss differs from every other variety. "When all is said, what is a kiss?" asked *Cyrano*, and he replied to his own question that it was "a rose red dot upon the letter i in loving," and many other delectable things besides, which so moved the heart of the fair *Roxane* that she cried out, "Come and gather it, the supreme flower!" But there the matter ended. She did n't say anything more about that particular kiss all the rest of the play. The i was dotted, the page turned. *Roxane*, however, was French. Mr. Belasco's recent heroines are not. Such *carpe diem* philosophy is impossible for them. They go on talking about the kiss till the end of the chapter. It is evidently a tremendous event in their young lives. The Girl of the Golden West, who had

tended bar in a California mining camp for years without a single lapse from the chaste standards of Dowie, Jr., which is one of the miracles of modern drama, had no regrets that her lover was a highwayman. But she could n't get over the fact that he "had her first kiss." She dwelt upon this awful loss with pathetic insistence. The little Rose of the Rancho, who had been "laughing in the leaves" for quite some time amid amorously inclined young men of Spanish extraction, was equally ignorant of the dotted i till her false lover kissed her. And then she ran to the shrine of the Virgin and wiped the vile thing from her lips. And in "The Warrens of Virginia" we find the same allegiance to the Prohibition party among the fair daughters of the F. F. V.'s. *Agatha Warren*, who in common with the rest of her family talks about "Southern chivalry" and such things to a degree that almost approaches realism, is quite as unkissed as her California sisters. And after her Northern lover has taught her the proper way to dot an i, it is that which rankles in her bosom when she learns his treachery. The mere fact that he has violated the hospitality of her home, that he has brought ruin on the Southern cause, disgrace upon her father, that he has done, though in the stern duty of war, a despicable thing and shattered her ideal of him,

is apparently as nothing beside the fact that he has kissed her. It is that she rages about, walking down stage toward the fireplace. For her the i seems to be measured by the size of the dot.

Now perish the thought that we should seem to speak lightly of so important a matter as a lady's kiss! It is a subject, to be sure, that we would not wish to appear too wise about; but we would not appear unduly ignorant either. And when *The Girl of the Golden West* sets so much store by something which neither her environment nor her instincts would have taught her was of supreme importance we are a bit skeptical. Again we are skeptical when *Miss Agatha* of Virginia naïvely tells *Lieutenant Burton* that down South a man does n't kiss a girl, nor a girl a man, till it 's very awfully important and meaningful. That is doubtless supposed to be another manifestation of "Southern Chivalry." Whether it is chivalrous or not is largely a matter of individual temperament! Whether it is true or not is another question, and one that cannot be decided except by the evidence of those who manifestly won't come into court to testify. But a certain gentle and kindly skepticism will surely not be construed as an insult, even in Virginia. Rather may it be taken as a compliment! If Southerners talked

a little less about their chivalry they might win more credence for it as something different and finer than the ordinary gentleman's regard for his women folk the world over. As it is the matters of sex probably absorb quite as much of the attention of Southern men and women as of Northern, and the Southern girl is probably no less instinctively on her guard against the sweet, amorous assaults of her chivalrous young cavaliers, and no more tenacious in resistance.

The whole question is one of very considerable unimportance. If there's anybody who does n't know that the kiss of first love, the betrothal embrace, is a high and holy thing, a civilized community is no place for him. And if there is anybody who does not know that there are also other kisses sweet and harmless; that the hymn of love's omnipotence never was and never can be chanted with meeting lips alone, he is a very curious sort of person. Mr. Belasco is overworking this kissing business. He has tried to give to something superficial and episodic the air of depth and finality. He has turned a simple manifestation of half physical passion into a dramatic convention and sought with it to achieve an effect of emotional reality. The attempt is so characteristic of his methods — we say his methods advisedly, though William De

Mille wrote "The Warrens of Virginia" — that it serves to point a lesson quite as well as anything else in this play at his theater.

For Mr. Belasco, widely heralded though he be as a realist, is as a matter of fact no realist at all. The achievement of true poetry perhaps requires the brightest talent and the most devoted effort. But next to that the achievement of realism is the most difficult task for the artist, one that requires insight, imagination, unflagging purpose, unflinching adherence to the truth. Realism is truth to the facts of life, and realism on the stage must be truth to the facts of life mirrored in an art form the most trying of all art forms to bend to reality. The playwright who would be a romantic or who would create melodramas is allowed considerable license of plot and incident; he can use various of the dramatic conventions with which the stage bridges the gulf between fact and fiction. But the realist cannot do this. No less than characters and scene must incident and plot be utterly natural. There must be truth to life in every department. Now, does anybody suppose it is easy to be true to life in one department alone, to say nothing of all? Two lovers quarrel in a room. The room looks just like a real room. But what are his feelings? What are hers? A searching interest in human nature is required to furnish

an answer; yet the realist must find that answer, else he is no realist. The writer of melodrama or romance may indicate some conventional mode of feeling — Mr. Belasco's heroine talks about her first kiss — and hasten on with his story; and we are no wiser than before. But the realist cannot do this, his passion being to get at the truth. He may have to peel off layer after layer of conventional utterance, but at last he will wring from his characters a true confession. And we have learned something. And just so the incidents of his play will be contributory to character, not "action," to the development of a picture of human life that interests us because it is human life, tingling with reality, not to the development of a story that interests us because we are excited to learn what will happen next. And yet the realist cannot ignore his story and remain a successful artist on the stage. Therefore he must win a technique so clairvoyant that it is not visible, enabling him to tell a story that seems not to be told but to happen. The successful realist must, in short, be neither a prosaic man nor a trivial one, but a man of searching mind and superb craftsmanship. Far from resting on superficial detail, his chief interest will lie in the deepest places of the heart. It is because his interest rests on surface detail and his insight is limited

to superficial reality that David Belasco is not a realist.

It is quite true that Mr. Belasco has never very stoutly maintained the contrary. A man of the theater in the most intimate sense of the term, all his life a stage director, producer, dramatist, manager, with a wonderful scenic imagination, and a sense for the more obvious phase of dramatic style unparalleled on our stage, so that nothing he shows can wholly fail of conviction, he has for many years been putting on plays to the best of his ability, entertaining a vast public and winning for himself a unique and honorable fame. He has never preached a philosophy of life nor announced that he had one to preach. Perhaps life does not greatly interest him, his interest in the theater is so tremendous and so absorbing. He is not the stuff that preachers are made of, and all realists are preachers of a kind. What Mr. Belasco has done has been to write pieces for the play-house, not criticisms of life. Well aware that such pieces to be successful or to satisfy his own standards must, however, superficially resemble life, he has bent his mind to devise them with all possible air of probability and with all possible fidelity of pictorial setting. Especially in the latter respect he has succeeded as no other man of our time has. The sitting-room of *Wes'*

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Bigelow's house in "A Grand Army Man," or the beautiful outdoor scene with its trees and saplings and broken gun carriage and running brook in "The Warrens of Virginia," or the interior set in the same play, which, by the simple but imaginative device of a window opening from the great room into the hall, allows the audience to see the tall clock, the stairs and the heads of people passing in that second room and begets an overpowering suggestion, of the spaciousness and solidity of the mansion — are all eloquent proofs of his scenic power, a power that is not without its touch of poetry too, and never without the painter's taste. And in a less marked degree he has so ordered the exits and entrances of all his players, guided their manners and gestures, worded their speeches and put in sequence their acts as to create again the sense of surface reality. So deftly and so carefully has he done it, in fact, that the unthinking have been deceived time and again at his dramas and supposed that the pleasure they were deriving from his well-told stories was the pleasure derived from the true picture of life, from thoroughgoing reality. And because of that fact it becomes the critic's duty to point out that his plays in the main are not reality. It would be silly to disparage the romance or the melodrama — good, healthful art forms both, and always to

be enjoyed. It would be equally silly to ask or expect Mr. Belasco to write like Sudermann or Ibsen. It would be absurd to belittle his fine achievement because it is not something different. And no carping critic even from a college English department would wish to see his plays any less successful. All that is asked is that it be borne in mind that his plays are not deeply reality, that they are good stories, not emotionally nor intellectually good dramas — in short, that a popgun is not the crack of doom.

That a hair, however, sometimes "divides the false and true" in drama as in philosophy "A Grand Army Man" bears witness. In that play, aided and inspired by the genius of David Warfield, himself a creator no less than his playwright and a man of reasoned and sound convictions about his art, Mr. Belasco has, by a mere shift of the emphasis, gone down through his surface details to the true realism beneath, instead of employing the details to hide the threadbare conventions of his story. In that play, thanks to Warfield, the emphasis has been placed on character; the story, none too fresh nor skilfully told, has been subordinated and simplified till the character interest dwarfs and hides it. What is conventional in the play gives place to what is real. And a true picture of American life

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has been painted, a true and lovely criticism spoken, if it is not indeed rather an appreciation than a criticism. Hence "A Grand Army Man" becomes a contribution to American drama, while "The Warrens of Virginia," like so many other of the Belasco productions, is only an ephemeral entertainment.

As such it can be mildly recommended to theatergoers who are not too insistent on freshness of plot or incident. If some of them are a little bored at the sentimental love scene between *General Warren* and his wife, knowing full well that it is just there to heighten the pathos of the climax, when it is certain long before the act is over that the *General's* happiness will be dashed to earth by the news of the Union ambush, we can only bid them be of good cheer — this is a melodrama they are looking on, and besides Frank Keenan as the *General* is acting very well indeed, displaying a power to suggest tenderness hitherto unsuspected. Work such as Mr. Keenan does in this play is not lightly to be passed over. He is still a little angular in style, a little acid, a little suggestive of the man whose effects are somehow cramped in the creation, so that they do not come from him quite with ease and spontaneity. But his range is wider in this part than it has ever been before, his personal presence more charming and his emotional expres-

sions far greater. It was always his gift to visualize a character and subordinate all details to that picture and its underlying significance. He could see a part whole. But as *General Warren* he sees a part large as well, and he is able to make it tell not only pictorially but emotionally, to make it live as a person, not a picture. This testy, proud, tender, courtly, narrow-minded, big-hearted Confederate commander of his is the one breathing figure in the play, the one character that exists after the final curtain has fallen, however interested you may be in the fate of the others while the story is in full race.

And because it is a living character, and because Mr. Keenan plays it so well, perhaps you will leave the theater wishing that the last act had been the first. Sitting under the roses before his Colonial mansion five years after the war, worn out with ploughing — he, a Warren of Virginia, forced now to work in his own fields! — the *General's* story has just begun. The curtain is just rung up on the tragedy of the old South. No melodrama can depict adequately the great struggle of '61 to '65; no drama, however deep and serious, can pack that tremendous bloodshed into the poor traffic of an evening on the stage. But the realist could take the *Warrens* on their impoverished plantation after the war was over and in a

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story as simple as he chose get at the depths of their fine, proud hearts and write a play worth while. After all the *General* is most appealing and most picturesque just when the present play is finishing. After all the present story is most interesting just when it is most superficial, conventional, and unsatisfactory — at the final scene when the Northern lover is forgiven for his treachery. We suspect he never was forgiven. But if he was, it was not after a five-minute interview — no, it was after prayers and tears and struggle and heartache. These struggles and these heartaches are *Agatha's* real drama. We should like to see them depicted, though not by Miss Charlotte Walker. We should like to see the real story of the Warrens of Virginia set forth upon the stage. After the fiction we should like the facts. We are grateful for the former, but there is a need it does not satisfy, a deeper hunger the Belasco drama does not meet.

THE CASTLES VS. MR. POLLOCK

(LYRIC, December 20, 1907)

SIR AUSTIN FEVEREL remarked that Woman will be the last thing civilized by Man. If that is true it is due not so much to the quality of the material as to the clumsy methods of the workman. Eternal warfare has never been conducive to the growth of civilization. What is needed is a peacemaker thrice blessed. And that the sexes are in eternal combat Mr. Meredith is not alone of our great thinkers in affirming. No less profound a philosopher and mighty an artist than Egerton Castle (also Agnes ditto) has declared much the same thing in that classic of recent fiction, "The Secret Orchard," which a few seasons back was what R. R. Whiting would call one of the six best smellers. Mr. Meredith, indeed, is so impressed with the greatness of the combat that he breaks into verse about it — into verse that can almost be read in the original. In his poem called "A Preaching From a Spanish Ballad" he remarks:

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Never nature cherished woman:
She throughout the sexes' war
Serves as temptress and betrayer,
Favoring man, the muscular.

And when the Spanish lady's roving husband
comes home to surprise her with a lover, to
whom she has boasted that she is "no help-
less woman," but a free agent, like Magda,
she cowers before him.

'Round his head the ancient terrors,
Conjured of the stronger's law,
Circle, to abash the creature
Daring twist beneath his paw.

How though he hath squandered Honour!
High of honour let him scold:
Gilding of the man's possession—
'T is the woman's coin of gold.

Well, perhaps! But woman will never be
raised to the rarefied atmosphere of masculine
civilization by keeping it so. That was the way
they did things back in the Middle Ages, when
mankind had reached about that stage of de-
velopment now represented by popular fiction
and drama. In the book which the Chevalier
Geoffrey de La Tour Landry made for the
"teching of his daughters" in 1371 are many
"fayr examples" of how the Erring Sister
was regarded by professing Christians in those
days of chivalry and cathedrals. Caxton made

a translation of the book, and he was the first to put it into print, in 1484. Here is a typical passage which must have edified the little daughters of the Knight of the Tower very much and taught them sweet charity. Out of our great reverence for Professor Brander Matthews we shall reproduce Caxton's spelling. The chapter is headed, "How before this tyme men punysshed them that were diffamed." The good knight seems a little wroth that Erring Sisters are no longer treated so badly as once they were in France. He sighs for the "good old days" prior to 1371!

"And yet," he says, "I ne knowe but fewe Reames this day, sauf the Reame of Fraunce and of Englonde, and in the lowe or basse Almayne, but that men doo justyse of them when the trouthe and certaynte of the dede may be openly knowen, that is to wete, in Romaine, in Spayne, in Aragon, and in many other Reames. In somme places men kytte of theire throtes, and in somme they be heded before the peple. And in other places they be mewred or put bytwene two walles. And therfor this Example is good and prouffitable to every good woman."

Alack, there was one form of torture unknown to this kindly old flower of French chivalry! Horrible as it is to be "mewred," or put between two walls, it is worse to be put

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between two covers, two castle walls, as it were. There the poor wronged damsel is not only heaped with scorn and dismissed without charity but she is absolutely inundated by a sea of rhetoric, drowned in a welter of hifalutin bombast. Our first impression after reading the book was one of utter bewilderment that such a work could ever have found a publisher or a public. We spoke of this to the very literary critic, and he said: "Humph; you had oughter read 'Three Weeks.'" Our next impression was one of admiration for Channing Pollock, who, while using so much of the language of the book, has contrived by boiling each speech down seventy five per cent to make it sound like human utterance and who has accomplished the more Herculean task, while using the characters and episodes of the book, of endowing them with some qualities of interest and some show of reality. We shall never forgive Mr. Pollock, if he did it of his own volition, for selecting such a book to dramatize. But once having dramatized it, we take off our hat to his accomplishment.

A third impression there was after reading the novel (besides, of course, drowsiness) — a renewed conviction that of all the cants of criticism none is less worthy of attention and respect than the shudder of horror at the "happy ending." The happy ending to a story

that begins unpleasantly is generally supposed to be "inartistic" and "illogical." As a matter of fact, in at least fifty cases out of a hundred it is nothing of the kind. "The wages of sin is death?" Not at all. Nothing is more certain than that sin often commands very good wages. And the scarlet woman is n't the only sinner on whom a lot of pity is wasted. It is the glaring plainness of this fact which makes the task of the moralist so hard. But, far more than this, what makes the average tragic ending in reality illogical and inartistic (because untrue) is the vast difference in time between popular literature and life; the morals and motives of such fiction are the morals and motives of the Middle Ages, or of the Cave men. The life of most of us is lived in the present generation. It is entirely to Mr. Pollock's credit that he discovered this fact. For "The Secret Orchard" is an excellent case in point. Its morals and motives are of the Middle Ages — if they ever existed in time or space! — even of the Caves. When *Lieutenant George Dodd* of the U. S. N., who represented manly strength and Anglo-Saxon resolution and a smooth face and everything dear to the sweet girl readers of the Castle brand of fiction, fell madly and devotedly in love with little *Joy*, it was a pleasant thing and in every way creditable to the young

gentleman. But when, on discovering that his sweetheart, whom he loved with all the devotion of his great, broad, manly Anglo-Saxon nature (42 chest, 6 inch expansion, please) had in her innocence and trustfulness once fallen a victim to the arch enemy, Man, what did he do? Did he pity her? Did he make any effort to provide for her, to safeguard her future? Did it enter his head to forgive her, to go on loving her? Oh, no! He at once reverted to type, he became a Cave man. Somebody else had taken a nibble of the fruit he wanted all to himself, so it no longer had any value for him. His great, strong Anglo-Saxon nature rose manfully to the occasion and he cried out to *Cluny*, the seducer, within hearing of the girl, too, "Bastard Stuart as you are — would you palm off your discarded mistress upon me!" The book tells us that these noble sentiments were "spat" at *Cluny*, and they were followed by a blow. The next morning this manly representative of Saxon chivalry killed *Cluny* in a duel, and went off to America without any further attention to poor little *Joy*, who just about then had some slight need of a friend or two.

And that is the ending which Mr. Castle deems "artistic" and "logical," and which he demands be restored to the play before the stage version is shown elsewhere. As far as

the book is concerned, the only logical and artistic ending is the waste-basket. As far as the play is concerned, Mr. Pollock's artistic sense is quite correct, because he doubtless realizes that not the loss of chastity but the loss of the desire to be chaste is what matters; that already white flags are being borne between the opposing lines in the battle of the sexes; that truly civilized men hold it logical rather than all honor be "coin of gold" than that a bimetallic standard prevail; that love which is worthy of the name forgiveth all things; finally, that even in Christendom there are beginning to be Christians. In the book *Joy* continued to love her seducer. That would be an excuse for the *Lieutenant's* failure to marry her. But nothing can excuse his base desertion of her. And nothing but the most primitive and conventional and fiction-fed mind can find any pleasure in his melodramatic duel with *Cluny*. It is the act of a Cave man, mad with the selfish lust of revenge. It is barbaric and silly. It has nothing to do with the standards of to-day. The critics who object to Mr. Pollock's ending, where *Joy*, who has come to loathe her seducer, is forgiven by her lover without debate, and where *Cluny*, instead of being shot down, is permitted by the *Lieutenant* very sensibly to work out his salvation through remorse, are Cave men critics. They

are pleading for a barbaric standard which has too long prevailed in the play-house, the standard which helped Maeterlinck to feel, after an evening at the theater, that he had been spending three hours with his ancestors.

Guy de Maupassant knew better than this, and nobody has ever accused him either of lack of artistry or undue optimism. Do you recall the brave little Jewess in "Mlle. Fifi," who was only "une putain"? She went back to her life of shame after her escape from the Prussians' dinner party. But, we learn at the close, "elle en fut tirée quelque temps après par un patriote sans préjugés qui l'aima pour sa belle action, puis l'ayant ensuite chérie pour elle-même, l'épousa, en fit une dame qui valut autant que beaucoup d'autres."

Ah, well, *Lieutenant Dodd* was n't "un patriote"; he was only an American. Sometimes there is a difference. Nevertheless it is impossible to escape the conviction that Mr. Pollock's ending gives to the play of "The Secret Orchard" whatever significance that drama has, for it is his personal reaction on the situation, his contribution of a "criticism of life" to a work that otherwise is conventional and unreal. In his earlier play, "The Little Gray Lady," Mr. Pollock tried to put on the stage a bit of life observed at first hand, a story of middle class life in Washington,

among Government employees. He lacked then the technical skill he has shown in "The Secret Orchard." But that earlier play was the more worth while just because it was observed at first hand, just because it was a piece of the author's experience. It is profoundly to be hoped that in his next play he will return to the fount of original inspiration, to himself — and not to any such trashy, stale, and feeble book by another as "The Secret Orchard." Mr. Pollock is young; he is one of the growing number of American young men who are beginning to get a hearing on our stage — Percy Mackaye, William De Mille, George Middleton, Owen Johnson, Austin Strong, and others. The next decade will find our native drama in their hands. And it cannot be too urgently pleaded that they stick to reality, to life as they see it; that they follow each his gleam and knuckle under as little as possible to the supposed standards of the box office, the ideas of ignorant managers; that they consent with protest to the easy dramatization of ephemeral fiction. It is n't in such fiction that a worthy drama is to be found; it is in the life they share and observe; still more it is in their inmost selves.

But all this while we have said nothing about *Joy's* eyes. They must have been very remarkable eyes, like those Mr. Hichens once wrote

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about. The hero of "An Imaginative Man" married a woman to find out the deep secret of her mysterious, unfathomable eyes. He found it. It was that there was n't any secret. They were just eyes. So he was greatly bored, and, being a Hichens hero, he went to North Africa, where he fell in love with the Sphinx and dashed out his brains against the left paw of that somewhat unresponsive sweetheart. So *Cluny* soothed his conscience during his conquest of *Joy* by finding the devil in her eyes. The *Lieutenant*, on the other hand, read there only sweetness and innocence. Miss Josephine Victor, who played the part, compromised on black rings.

MORAL: When you see what you want, don't make excuses.

THE ROUGH DIAMOND AS HERO

(DALY'S, January 18, 1908)

LET us sing of the playwright and his balloons. Styles change in balloons as in everything else, but the scientific construction of the balloon remains the same — a light, tight covering inflated with gas or hot air. A decade ago the prevailing style was a pretty pink, the color of an Anthony Hope romance. "Made in Zenda" had to be the hall-mark on the bag. Now there has been a radical change, and a yellowish, whitish, brownish tinge is demanded, a mixture of gold, alkali dust, and Nevada or Arizona mud. "Made in a Western mining camp" is the required hall-mark. But exactly the same principle makes the balloons go up — gas. As an aëronaut Mr. Paul Armstrong has made two successful flights. Now, at Daly's Theater, he has attempted a third, with a cheering multitude on hand to ease away on the ropes and watch, with craning necks, the hardy adventurer soar to a dot against the blue empyrean. Only, for some reason or other, the balloon refused to soar. Ballast bag after ballast bag

of jokes and "funny lines" were thrown out of the car. Still the balloon did not tug at its anchor ropes, still it did not ascend. And at last the suspicion grew to a certainty that something was the matter with the gas; its specific gravity had gone wrong; it had become as dense as the surrounding atmosphere, the normal atmosphere in which we live and move and have our being with our two feet on the earth.

A chemical investigation was at once ordered, and the presence discovered in the tanks of a strange, foreign element suspiciously like oxygen. How it got there none of the experts could say, unless its presence was to be explained by a kind of chemical telepathy, for this oxygen is none other than the common sense of the public. The whole matter is one to engage Mr. Thomas's attention. At any rate its presence in the tanks was quite sufficient to spoil the flight of the balloon, and the good gas bag "Society and the Bull-dog," instead of voyaging among the clouds and hobnobbing with Orion, remained fast at its anchorage, wabbling groggily. And, with the best wishes in the world for the success of Mr. Paul Armstrong and the native drama, the judicious observer cannot feel sorry. For when the native drama would base its claims to attention on any such false and jingo pictures

of American characters and conditions as those of this play in particular, and in the main of the whole school of alkali dust dramas, failure is the only fate deserved. Gas it is that inflates them, gas that makes them go up; and when the gas is exhausted they shall come down and hang inverted in a treetop, like the nest of last year's oriole.

One of them there is, to be sure, which marks an honorable exception, "The Great Divide." And it is not the intellectual subtlety nor the nervous beauty of the language nor the high poetic quality of the images scattered through it that makes this drama an astonishing exception so much as it is the simple common sense of its characterizations. Intellectual subtlety and nervous prose and poetic imagery are not to be expected save from an unusual playwright, a man of wide culture and fine training and deep imagination. It is not astonishing when these qualities are absent, even from successful plays. But simple truth to fact, ordinary common sense in characterization and incident, ought to be the possession of every dramatic author, high or low, or else his right to scribble plays at all may be called very seriously in question. "The Great Divide" was a drama that contrasted the "rough diamond" West with the much abused East; but Mr. Moody, being neither a rank senti-

mentalist nor a blind man, realized that rough diamonds, even when they are miners, are the better for cutting and polishing; and that the inherited dignity from generations of men and women of gentle breeding, the refinements of a civilized community, the moral conscience of a developed people, are not lightly to be put aside, are not easily to be worsted, indeed are not to be worsted at all, but only infused with blood a little fresher and more primitive. Mr. Moody's type of the West was a drunken miner bent on rape; of the East, a fine woman with instincts strong yet refined, with a mind alert and open, yet guided by, if you like, a New England conscience. That this man was a type of the whole West, or this woman a type of the whole East, it would be folly to assert. But at least no facts were juggled with, common sense was not put to the blush, the absurd spectacle was not presented of culture made a mockery and crudeness glorified into one of the cardinal virtues.

Common sense, however, seems to be the last quality prized by the playwright; hence the alkali dust school of drama, a thing of warped perspective, false characterization, exaggerated sentimentality and copious crudities. Perhaps Bret Harte was to blame in the beginning, laying, as he did, over the realism of his tales the shimmer of his fun and the

golden glamor of his romance. That fun and that romance were surely their own justification, and "The Luck of Roaring Camp" will remain imperishable. But in other hands and in the coarser medium of drama the fun is cheapened, the romance dies away, and now even the realism has vanished, giving place to an absurd conventionality. What truth or value is there in all this pack of "Western" plays with which we in the East have been deluged, all of them informing us how noble is the rough-shod miner, how feeble and rotten are we? Has anybody dramatized the Western Federation of Miners? Have we seen Moyer, or Haywood, or Pettibone as the hero of a play, or Harry Orchard? Has it ever been intimated in one of these dramas that men and women of gentle breeding and refined tastes and fine ideals do now and then dine, yes, and even dance, in New York restaurants such as Sherry's, and that beside them one of these "rough diamonds," however noble his heart, would cut rather a sorry figure, would represent, after all, a lower round in the ladder of civilization? The real problem is n't to get down to him, but to get him up.

Once upon a time one of these "rough diamonds" from Arizona, a man who there is every reason to believe was eminently respectable in morals and had never put a bomb

under anybody's front gate, came to New York, lunched at Sherry's, and was conducted through the prominent streets of the city. Finally he said: "Me for the desert again! I can't stand this. I want room to think in!" One imagines Paul Armstrong's bosom heaving with joy at this remark, his soul expanding with an answering ardor. But a chilly little stubborn fact will not out of the way. No doubt this miner went back to Arizona; no doubt he thought and thought and thought till his brains were numb, like the babes in Toyland. But Peterkin's question remains to be answered, "What good came of it at last?" Alack! his thoughts were wasted on the desert air! He may have been a mute, inglorious Kant, for all we can say. But there were no citizens of Königsberg to set their watches at 4.30 when he went by, little and sober and mild. No old Lampe on threatening days "was seen anxiously following him with a large umbrella under his arm, like an image of Providence." No manuscript that should shake the world with its ideas was cumulating, mountains high, in his study. At most he increased a little with his pick the world's store of yellow gold for us to scramble and fight for in the stifling market-place. And while he was thinking his great thoughts out there in the desert to mingle with the alkali dust in

symbolic union, right here in the Eastern metropolis Professor Dewey was lecturing at Columbia on the Relativity of Truth to scores of young men, and noted physicians were working at the problem of preventive medicine, and a myriad books were being written out of which some tiny percentage of the far more precious ore of human knowledge will be extracted for future generations to profit by. Indeed, this task of contrasting the rough-shod West with the degenerate East, the mining camp with the metropolis, is not so simple and easy as the alkali dramatists seem to suppose. And let us, however charmed we may be, and quite legitimately charmed, with the picturesqueness and humor of mining camp or ranch, in the name of common sense have done with supposing that the task is accomplished when a deluge of sentimentality has been poured through the drama and the rough diamond takes his daughter back to the gulch, satisfied that his way is the best way and conscious that the author would have us think so, too.

In the face of this fundamental falsity, certain other faults in "Society and the Bulldog" assume a relative unimportance. Yet they are not unimportant to Mr. Armstrong if he is to continue to write plays with a hope of any significant success. And the most crying of these faults, perhaps, is not so much his

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careless and clumsy observation — or at least his rendering — of the usages of polite society, even of the near-society represented in this play, as his fatal trick of mixing up farce and burlesque and drama in a jumble absolutely fatal to illusion. A certain unity of style is demanded, even in an alkali drama. If we are to accept as serious the noble sentiments and sturdy fiber of the rough diamond hero, there must be some seriousness in the portrait of the society which, by contrast, brings his splendid character into the light. If the one is n't true, the other will not seem so. The entrance of the tenderfoot in the first act of the new play, coming into a Nevada mining camp clad in comic opera green riding clothes that he never under any circumstances would have worn, and carrying a golf bag, though it was already half past six in the evening and he must have known there was n't a course within three hundred miles, was like a slap in the face to the audience. The spectator who had supposed that he was looking at least on an attempted reproduction of life sank back prepared for almost any absurdity, even the strains of the "Rosary" wailed on a parlor organ under the stage while the heroine tells the hero that she loves him. Yet even this preparation was insufficient quite to allay amazement at the happenings that follow in Sherry's, the Lew Fields

waiters, the fantastic "society" people, the opera bouffe extravagances. The last glimmerings of illusion gave way to laughter long before the act was over. Even farce can have some outward semblance of reality. But this wild burlesque had none. Disregard of all artistic unity, scorn or indifference to the common sense and taste and judgment of the public, could go no further. "Society and the Bull-dog" deserved no better fate than failure.

ON TAKING COHAN SERIOUSLY

(GARRICK, February 3, 1908) - 1942

WHEN George M. Cohan, author, poet, actor, composer, stage manager, conductor, in short one of the most versatile artists and mighty minds that incubates near the southwest corner of Broadway and Forty-second Street, is in New York, forty-five minutes will take him quite far enough from the bright lights. But when he is in Boston forty-five miles is not far enough away. So he journeyed out to Brookfield, Massachusetts, which is about fifty miles from the Hub by railroad and a hundred by the Boston and Albany, and wrote a play about that hitherto in-offensive village. He called his play "Fifty Miles from Boston," and he showed it at the Garrick Theater, with Edna Wallace Hopper as the village postmistress and Laurence Wheat as the hero.

This hero was none other than *Joe Westcott*, just home from dear old Harvard, where he had won the baseball game by his magnificent pitching. Of course, Brookfield turned out to be the last broiler to welcome him. That's the

way they always do when you get home from college. The really improbable thing about it is that Harvard won the game! Now, *Joe* loved *Sadie Woodis*, the village postmistress. The Government paid *Sadie* so well for reading postal cards that she sported silk stockings and a picture hat of magnificent proportions. *Sadie* loved *Joe*, too. But *Sadie's* bad, naughty little brother had swiped four hundred dollars out of the post office till to bet on Yale with (it looked like a safe risk!), and only *Dave Harrigan*, the Brookfield Dude, knew about it. *Dave* was awful sweet on *Sadie*, also, but he did n't have a look in. She told him so while she pumped real water from a real pump, which proved this a rural drama. So *Dave* told *Jed Woodis*, the brother, that he'd peach on him if he did n't make *Sadie* throw *Joe* over in his favor. *Jed* sure was up against it bad, and he did as he was bid, which gave Edna Wallace Hopper a chance to be emotional and helped out the comedy.

Just before the end of the second act it looked as if *Sadie* would have to give up *Joe* or see little brother spend twenty days in the shade. In fact you were quite sure that she was going to give up *Joe*, right then and there, for the post office inspector was due the next morning. But soft! What noise is this that breaks upon the still evening air? Can it be?

No? Yes? It is — it is the village fire bell! Can it be again? Is the hand of fate so kind? Do such things really happen? They do! The post office is on fire! A great sigh of relief swept over the audience (or was it laughter?). Let the inspector come! Ashes tell no tales! *Jed* was saved. *Sadie* was saved. *Joe* should make his home run after all. And Edna Wallace Hopper need be emotional no longer!

After this act, which was the last but one, Mr. Cohan made a speech. He said he hoped nobody would take him seriously. Now, the author who comes before a curtain and asks the audience not to take his work seriously is pretty sure to have his request granted. If an author does n't regard his own efforts as worthy of serious consideration, nobody else under heaven is going to reverse his judgment. Of course, no work that is n't taken seriously, even the most fantastic farce — taken, that is, as an effort toward achieving some sort of definite artistic effect — will in the long run command any attention, bring any credit to author or producer. So when Mr. Cohan comes forth and attempts to apologize for the crudeness and triteness and absurd childishness of his play by asking the audience not to take him seriously, he is in reality publicly confessing his failure and his unfitness to claim consideration as a dramatic author.

As a musician, of course, Mr. Cohan has always been a joke. His idea of composition is to take a good tune and spoil it. He tosses "Yankee Doodle," "Dixie," a Sousa march, a few yards of ragtime, a stock waltz or two into a pot, sets it on the stove and waits till it comes to a boil. Then he skims off the waste matter which rises — and, lo! that scum is a Cohan overture, or march, or waltz, or "patriotic song," or anything you choose, according to the tempo employed by the conductor. But as a playwright Mr. Cohan used to show gleams of something better than this. There were moments of hilarious farce in "Running for Office." In certain other of his pieces the slang and easy, "nervy" poise of the young race-track hanger-on were caught with something like fidelity and with a good bit of flip humor. "Running for Office" had claims to serious consideration as a farce with songs, a rough kind of comedy vaudeville, to employ the French term. There were times when "Forty-five Minutes from Broadway" had claims to serious consideration as a genre picture, a half unconscious rendering of character types that George Ade would depict consciously and with a touch of satire.

And as long as Mr. Cohan stuck to this genre, to the depiction of these types, in the limited field of broad humor (or Broadway

humor!), no sensible person could complain. If you did n't like these types, these flip young men loaded with the latest slang, it was your privilege to stay away, knowing that by no chance would it occur to Mr. Cohan to make fun of them as well as with them, that for him they represented the hero in his finest form. Many did like them, went to see and applaud them, and there was no harm done except for the subtle debasement of taste that must inevitably result from careless listening to such atrocious music as Mr. Cohan's.

But, emboldened and perhaps a little over-elated by his success, Mr. Cohan was not content to go on doing the things he knew how to do and had some right to do. He must needs rush in where better men than he have trod with timid feet; he must needs try to depict emotions, create melodramatic situations, render types of character far afield from either his acquaintance or his tastes. And he has become hopelessly lost. His work is futile, his labors barren, because he has disclosed neither the human sympathy nor the intelligent observation, nor the technical skill truthfully to depict men and women when their hearts are touched and to set them in a plausible and sustained story. Such a piece of work as "Fifty Miles from Boston," considered as a play — and that, in spite of Mr. Cohan's ex-

cuses, is exactly what it aims to be — is so silly, false and ineffective, and was so ridiculously played by its heroine into the bargain, that one is hard put not to get serious about it, seriously angry. Such a play is a kind of insult to our intelligence. And the attitude of its author, this “I hope you will not take me seriously” pose — as if any artist that is n’t worth taking seriously is worth taking at all! — is a greater insult still, for it insults his fellow playwrights and his brother actors as well as us. However, there is a retribution so certain that we can afford to keep our tempers and pass on to more important matters. Mr. Cohan’s play fell of its own dullness and falsity. The truth is mighty and shall prevail. Even Mr. Cohan cannot stop it.

"THE HONOR OF THE FAMILY"

(HUDSON, February 19, 1908)

ONCE upon a time there was a man who hearkened to the persuasive patter of a book agent, and bought a complete set of the works of Balzac, illustrated with alleged etchings. He opened the pages in one volume, the "Droll Stories." This volume he has loaned frequently. He says his friends like Balzac. A considerable amount of popular appreciation of the novelist Rodin has immortalized in a bath-robe is based on a similar selection from his writings. This may be due in part to the fact that Balzac is one of those authors you can safely admire without reading, you can appreciate without enjoying. At any rate, it is doubtful if "Un Ménage de Garçon" (or "La Rabouilleuse," as Balzac himself later preferred to call it) is widely enough known to act as a lure for "The Honor of the Family," shown in America by Otis Skinner. That play here will have to stand or fall solely on its intrinsic interest. And it can the more readily do that, as it is only remotely Balzac after all; as it is a farcical

melodrama dominated by Mr. Skinner at his best.

"The Honor of the Family" is an English version by Paul M. Potter of "*La Rabouilleuse*," by Emile Fabre, produced in Paris at the Odéon in 1903, and crowned by the Academy. The French piece was announced simply as "d'après Balzac," and one fancies was perhaps inspired by old *Hochon's* remark in the novel about *Philippe* and *Max*: "Those two fellows rolled up to meet each other like two storm clouds." The difficulties of translating "*La Rabouilleuse*" may well excuse the change in the English title, and in book and play alike *Philippe* is the real figure, not *Flore*, the fish whipper. Those who know the book, surely one of Balzac's best, for all the sudden development of *Philippe's* intellectual powers in midstory, must not expect, however, to find the play very close "after Balzac." Aside from the insurmountable difficulty of packing a Balzac novel into the compass of an evening on the stage, is the unmitigated villainy of *Philippe* himself, one of the most abominable and vividly drawn scoundrels in the entire "Comedy." The theater is not yet free enough from convention to endure such a villain as a hero! And in the novel there is *Joseph* as mitigation, but too palely drawn to serve as dramatic stuff. Alas, Balzac's naughty folk are always

his best! So "The Honor of the Family" is after all not Balzac but a play suggested by Balzac. Balzac may thus briefly be packed off stage, and the play enjoyed without further thought of him.

The play begins when the novel is half done and concerns itself entirely with what went on in poor old senile *Père Rouget's* house after *Philippe* arrived on the scene. Instead of the sinister, evil, cruel, hypocritical monster of the book, *Philippe* is a swaggering guardsman, more Dumas than Balzac, habitually something the sort of man Petrucio assumed to be. Mr. Skinner garbed himself in cavalry boots and a faded military frock coat, bought a loaded cane and borrowed Oscar Hammerstein's hat, which came down to the bridge of his nose. Thus picturesquely arrayed, he burst into the house of his uncle, old *Rouget*, where *Max* and *Flore* were in possession conspiring for the *Rouget* millions. From that moment he swaggered and swore and shot terrible glances from his brilliant eyes, and browbeat and cajoled and plotted and planned, and had his will (and his uncle's will!) before he was done. He killed *Max* in a duel, to get rid of him. He proposed marriage to *Flore* to get a firmer hold on the fortune. He was a serio-comic hero out of wild romance, delightful, picturesque, exuber-

ant — and no more like Balzac than Dumas is like Ibsen.

The natural exuberance of Mr. Skinner, the vitality, that is, of his style and personality, amply fit him for the first requirement of this rôle. From the first moment when his head appears outside the great window till the last curtain this exuberance never flags, this swaggering, fighting, strong-headed, loud-mouthed soldier never lets the attention lapse from him, never lets it be felt that his is not the dominant will. But Mr. Skinner adds a rare grace of plastic movement, a fund of comedy, now broad, now ironic, the force and distinction of a diction learned when the art of speech was held in higher esteem than now, the delights of striking and significant facial expression, and finally the crowning virtue of truth to character that permits him no possible lapses into sentimentality, no deviation from the ideal laid down at the first. It is a performance that has won for Mr. Skinner in New York the tardy acknowledgment, deserved long ago, that he is one of our leading actors.

The part of *Flore* ("La Rabouilleuse") is the only other one in the comedy of much significance. This was originally played by Miss Percy Haswell, without distinction. The *Rabouilleuse* was physically beautiful and morally ugly. She was crafty, avaricious, strong

willed. She was also a sensualist. Miss Haswell was the ordinary stock company leading woman doing the ordinary things that leading women do in the ordinary drama. Thus her duels with Mr. Skinner were one-sided affairs from the beginning. But Mr. Skinner's *Philippe* is so big and so vital and so picturesque that many shortcomings can be overlooked for its sake and "The Honor of the Family" cheerfully recommended to all theatergoers whenever and wherever it is performed by that sterling actor.

CRANE AS A SIX CYLINDER KID

(EMPIRE, March 2, 1908)

THE latest in the long list of characters assumed by William H. Crane for the delight of the American public is *Lemuel Morewood*, in George Ade's new play, "Father and the Boys"; and as *Lemuel Morewood* he gave a convincing and comical demonstration of how it is possible, even at fifty, to move rapidly from a position fourteen miles behind the procession to one seven miles ahead of the band. In fact, he finally left the band so far in the rear that he had to go back for them. That is George Ade for it. In the less poetic language of the always dignified dramatic review Mr. Crane played the part of a country reared New York merchant who had retained, for all his money, the simple country tastes and the thrifty country habits of his boyhood. But his two sons had not. He had sent them to college, where one was graduated with a "summa cum" in football, the other with an exaggerated ambition to become a cotillon leader. Taking them into the firm with him, *Father* still had to work

ten hours a day, while *Thomas* boxed with an ex-lightweight in the private office, and *William* entertained in his corner a society leader with a name combed in the middle (a clever woman, somebody called her, and *Father* dryly remarked that a woman had to be after she was forty). It was a clear case of everybody working *Father*.

But *Father* was n't that kind of a man — not for long. He got a bit tired of being told that he was fourteen miles behind the procession. He was n't very strong for seeing his sons get the loafing habit, still less for seeing them fleeced at roulette in his own house by certain of their "society" friends. So he drank his glass of milk and went up to bed, and then came down again in a full evening dress suit (as they say in Brooklyn), bought a stack of yellow chips and busted the bank, represented by *Major Bellamy Didsworth*, man about town. Then he said he guessed he would n't play any more and took *Bessie Brayton*, a Western product, out to supper.

That was Act II, "The Boys and Father." Act III was just "Father." He had reached the race-track with his Western product and a "betting commissioner." He had shed thirty years of his life. He had n't been near the office for a month. The poor boys had to

spend whole hours there now. Everything was coming his way, even the ponies. Fourteen miles behind the procession? He was miles ahead and going stronger every minute. His sons were horrified. They pleaded with their rebellious parent. But it was vain. He was off for Goldfield with *Bessie*, his Western product, and they after him to save him from the toils of a designing woman. Now, of course, it was all right. Mr. Ade is nothing if not moral. The Goldfield trip was to save *Bessie's* mine. It also gave the author a chance to say that if you want to see those "picturesque Western costumes" you must go to the theater in New York. The only folks who wore them in his play were the Easterners. *Bessie* saved her mine and found her sweetheart (who owned the other half of the mine, by the way, Mr. Ade throwing in retribution in full measure). The Boys were taught a lesson and *Father* probably returned eventually to his nine o'clock game of checkers and his glass of milk.

A jovial, wholesome, boyish, naïve story this, told with the utmost spirit, with racy, picturesque dialogue, with those little, half-satirical touches of observation that are so much a part of Mr. Ade's charm. It never goes far below the surface, but it is human and it is appealing. And for two acts it is farce that often

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trembles on the verge of comedy, that just misses being chiefly interesting not for its fun but for the really touching predicament of *Father*, his plaintively dry efforts to make his boys realize that life is a serious thing. Then it sinks rapidly into farce, into farce that doesn't quite cover, either, the joints of its structure. But Mr. Ade's fun is still potent, still characteristic enough to hold the interest and carry the play to success.

Mr. Crane, of course, is quite competent for the rôle of *Father*. The under note of country sincerity, of a warm, generous nature, is never lacking in his performance; and the dry humor of the character, the comic perplexities, the efforts to master slang, to call himself a "Six Cylinder Kid" without self-consciousness, and, above all, the unctious abandonment to juvenile revels, are all denoted surely, easily, and with delightful effect. Mr. Crane has played bigger parts in better plays, but "*Father and the Boys*" has the breath of wholesome fun in it, and it will be welcome on our stage so long as Mr. Crane cares to keep it in his repertoire.

“TODDLES” AS A TEXT

(GARRICK, March 16, 1908)

WE are minded to preach a sermon with “Toddles” as the text. For “Toddles” curiously invites to the consideration of serious things, even if it is an adaptation by Clyde Fitch from the French. That is n’t exactly what its authors intended when they wrote it, nor what Mr. Barrymore intended when he played it. But if, as Heine remarks, “even in the highest pathos of the World Tragedy bits of fun slip in; the desperate republican who, like Brutus, plunged a knife to his heart perhaps smelt it first to see whether some one had not split a herring with it,” it is equally true that in the maddest fun of theatrical farce bits of seriousness slip in. The desperate reviewer sitting at the Garrick Theater even as he watched *Toddles* in his mad efforts to avoid making up his mind was inevitably reminded of poor Benjamin Constant.

And who, pray, was Benjamin Constant?

Benjamin Constant was a man, in the words of Professor James, “often marvelled at as an extraordinary instance of superior intelligence

with inferior character." At least he accomplished this — he made many foot-notes for learned books on psychology. But he himself, as recorded in his "Journal" (Paris, 1895), did not foresee any such useful, not to say exalted, outcome to his life. "I am tossed and dragged about by my miserable weakness," he writes. "Never was anything so ridiculous as my indecision. Now marriage, now solitude; now Germany, now France; hesitation upon hesitation, and all because at bottom I am *unable to give up anything*."

Is it possible that the Frenchmen who first gave *Toddles* life, M. Tristan Bernard and M. Andre Godfernaux, were acquainted with the classic case of Mr. Constant? Or is it simply that the tribe of Benjamin is many in the land? At any rate if *Toddles* had been capable of introspection and possessed of the needful intelligence to set down what he saw he could have written of himself in these very words of the inconstant Mr. Constant. For *Toddles* too was beset by "an all round amiability"; he was unable to get mad at any of his alternatives, or, which amounts to the same thing, he could get mad at all of them by turns. And so he too was incapable of action, could not make up his mind. Now the act of making up one's mind is by no means so simple and voluntary a matter as some of us suppose. We

are all at best a bundle of warring impulses and inhibitions. "Act," says an impulse. "Don't act," says an inhibition. And whether we act or not depends far less often than one would like to admit on our "will power," in the ordinary sense of the term. It depends on the relative force of the impulse and the inhibition. A soldier stands irresolute in action. His will power cannot drive him to advance. But his comrades sweep by with a yell and a cheer. The impulse is suddenly strengthened. Before he knows it he is looking into the mouth of a cannon. Or his comrades sweep by the other way, and with equal unconsciousness he is in full flight. "Buy that necktie in the window" says the impulse. "Don't buy it," says the inhibition of prudence, "you have already far more than you need." And you walk on half a block. But your feet drag at the corner, and presently you are back inside the store, waiting for change. Impulse has won, has caused you to act, has made up your mind for you because your passion for neckties is stronger than your sense of prudence. But if on the corner you had recalled that your money was needed for your sick mother or your own dinner you would not have gone back, because prudence, re-enforced by this other inhibition, would have carried the day. Let any one bring back to mind the things he

has done in sudden anger or under the stimulus of any strong passion or excitement that he would not have dreamed of doing under normal circumstances, could not have "willed" himself to do, and it may become apparent that the so-called "lack of will power," the pathetic incapacity for action, inability to make up the mind, which seems to stunt so many lives, is in reality but a lack of genius for emotion, a weakness of impulse, so that the inhibitions habitually win the day, and the career of that man is barren.

Now *Toddles* had an inhibitive mind. The intensity of his feelings was always below the discharging point, as the psychologists would say, since they know that any feeling, if strong enough, is bound to discharge itself into action of some kind or other. *Toddles* was not ignorant of what he wanted or of what he did n't want. He simply did n't want anything hard enough, did n't repudiate anything hard enough, to drive his inhibitions of laziness, love of luxury, and the rest to the wall and ring from him a definite Yes or No. *Toddles* knew that marriage would bring him greatly needed money and companionship which he desired. But there were a pack of inhibitions not unknown to bachelors before now which barred the way, and he could not make up his mind to overcome them, because his impulses

were not strong enough. On the other hand, after he had once been definitely pledged to matrimony the negative impulse to resist was not intense enough to conquer, and *Toddles* finally got out of bed on his wedding morning and into his tub unable to see his way out of his dilemma. But while he was tubbing his clothes were stolen. The way out was found for him. He did not have to make up his mind at all! With a cry of pathetic joy he leaped back into bed, where he lay, the sorry symbol of chronic irresolution.

And the tragedy of *Toddles* is the moral tragedy of human life, that comes about, not because we do not know the higher from the lower way, right from wrong, wise from foolish, but because our impulses for the high, the right, the wise do not possess sufficient explosive force to conquer our inhibitions. Some one has said that "life is one long contradiction between knowledge and action." No one in this world knows better the upper from the nether road than the hopeless failures, the lights that failed, the men of early promise, of brilliant minds and no achievement, the critics who do not construct, the reformers who only chatter. "As far as moral insight goes," James remarks of such men, "in comparison with them the ordinary and prosperous philistines whom they scandalize are sucking babes."

And he cites Rousseau and Restif, men who, knowing the higher, could only follow the lower road, because only there were their impulses strong enough to discharge into action. But even for such men an impulse sufficiently re-enforced will alter all their lives. Just as fear can convert a criminal into a saint, just as the news of Juliet's death roused Romeo into a man of action, the sudden blossoming of something akin to real affection in *Toddles* rallied his scattered impulses, drove his habitual inhibitions in a pack out of his brain and converted the wavering, hesitating, irresolute, terrified victim at the matrimonial altar into an ardent lover fearlessly facing the marriage ring. It may be love is a kind of madness, but madness has given the courage for more mighty deeds (madness and anger) than "will power" ever did. *Toddles's* case is a shining example of the dynamic force of the ruling passion.

But this being a sermon, it is time now for the moral. And the moral is, "Acting is not so easy as it looks."

For why else rear this towering superstructure of psychology on the poor little foundation of "Toddles" than to make plain the reason why the play here, with John Barrymore, was not the success it was in London, with Cyril Maude? Mr. Maude is an actor of varied powers and wide experience. Only a year ago

he was playing James A. Herne's famous part in "Shore Acres." From *Nathaniel Berry* to *Toddles* is a very considerable register. To say that he was a success as *Toddles* because the part fitted him is not to explain his success in scores of dissimilar parts. It is the actor's business to fit his part, not to make the part fit him. It is his business to have a technique that will accommodate itself to any and all demands. And such a technique is not acquired in a day, a month, a year, nor by intuition or inheritance. It is acquired by playing many parts, by practice, practice, practice. No one supposes that Sembrich could sing the songs of every mood and period with flawless art and careful differentiation without a vocal technique won by years of effort and a wide acquaintance with all schools of music. Yet the idea seems to prevail that an actor can play any part, so long as it chances to "fit" his personality, with almost no technique at all. We would not accept a violinist whose bowing was faulty, whose intonation was false, who failed to interpret the music he played, merely because we liked his face, his smile, his "personality." But as a public we are very far from even this rather fundamental standard of criticism where acting is concerned. We care no more for the technique of acting than some of the players we applaud.

That is not quite true either, for in the long run we unconsciously bow to greatness, to superior skill, and forget our inefficient favorites of the moment. Gradually the Sotherns, the Skinners, emerge and take their rightful places. But it would save time if we were a bit more conscious about it. There would be less temptation then for managers, who in all truth are hard enough put to find efficient players, to cast young men and women of pleasant personality in parts beyond their powers, thus making of plays that might give pleasure at most but half-hearted successes.

For Mr. Barrymore, the bearer of a distinguished and honorable name in the stage world, young, attractive, promising, is still technically unequipped for the part of *Toddles*. The play is a farce, light, frivolous; the part is a farcical part. But so is *Dundreary* a farcical part; yet Sothern waited till he could play *Hamlet* before he attempted it. If a farce has the qualities of genuine popularity (and "Toddles" has) it has them because it exaggerates humanity, not falsifies it. And you cannot exaggerate a trait of character if you cannot depict it in its natural state. You cannot create a farcical character, clean-cut, consistent from curtain to curtain, an entity, if you cannot maintain a character delusion without exaggeration. If we loaded poor *Toddles*

with text-book phrases out of psychology it was to show the human basis of his character — the basis which, if clearly brought out by a resourceful actor, would make him, for all his farce, a human being to the audience. But to bring this out requires a sure technique; for the actor it is a solemn task, no less difficult than to play many a "serious" rôle.

No one has ever gone on record as accusing Mr. Sothern of being, personally, at all like *Dundreary*. In fact, the dissimilarity might almost be called striking. But Mr. Sothern's *Dundreary* in the play is comic, first and foremost, for its unflagging fidelity to character, its unity of design, its constant revelations in a hundred little ways of a very human if monstrously exaggerated type of brain. Nothing that he says or does, no single chuckle or facial expression but clearly reveals this central psychological conception. And to do this requires technique, technique, and again technique. Not a single halted utterance or sudden concentration of attention in the search for his pockets, but is the surer, hence the more comic, for the musing moods of *Hamlet*. Not a single cry of triumph at the solution of an absurd conundrum, but is more effective for the romantic heroism of "Zenda" or "If I Were King." That is so true it is platitudinous; but please remember this is a sermon!

Now *Toddles* in his lesser way had his psychological basis of character; he was a human, if exaggerated, entity. He was a man who could n't make up his mind, a baby in long breeches. Mr. Barrymore knew this, and he tried as best he could to indicate it. But his task was too much for him, and he was only occasionally successful, simply because he lacked technique, he had not the trained resources of his art sufficiently at his command. His *Toddles* did not "hang together," the moods from moment to moment were not clearly related to the character as a whole, and in their several places they were not indicated surely, cleanly. His command over facial expression is slight. His command over accent is slighter. He feels for effects restlessly, with hands, voice, body, and creates the sense of effort, not of achievement. To be sure, he was constantly hindered, not helped, by a badly trained company. But the cause of his failure was deeper than that; it lay in the actor himself, in his lack of technique. If Mr. Barrymore, like Mr. Maude, could play *Nathaniel Berry*, he too, like Mr. Maude could play *Toddles*. Life may be a survival of the fittest, but actors too often suppose it to be a survival of the best fitted. Well, it is — only, not quite the way they mean.

WHERE IS OUR DRAMA OF '76?

(GARDEN, April 20, 1908)

ONCE upon the Fourth of July a patriotic American visited a London music hall where a "human encyclopædia" was answering questions such as "In what year did Milosh Orenvertch knock Kara George on the head and start the feud in Serbia?" or "How many pins laid in a row would it take to reach from London to Paris?" and the American asked, "What great event took place on the Fourth of July?" The human encyclopædia walked well down to the foot-lights angrily. "That wa'h'n't no great event," said he, "that were a bloomin' houtrage!"

Why is it that this "bloomin' houtrage," which is a towering point in American history, which has been productive of more fire-crackers, burned fingers and fervid perorations than any other event in our career as a nation, has never had adequate representation on our stage—it nor any event of our War for Independence? Why is it that the New Theater,

when it opens on Central Park West will find no American historical drama of our early and surely dramatic days worthy of a place in its répertoire? Why have all the plays about the Revolution, from the first years after that struggle down to Edward Vroom's "The Luck of Macgregor" at the Garden Theater, been comparative failures? "Why have they been failures?" say you. "Why, because they have been such bad plays." Granted; but that really explains nothing, any more than the managerial tradition that "the public does n't want such plays" explains anything, being a statement not of cause but effect, the effect of bad dramas. To answer the question one must find out why our War for Independence has not inspired good plays, why it has not produced a drama to satisfy the historical sense, to rouse patriotic enthusiasm and meet also the requirements of the dramatic form. Surely there is at least one big play in the Revolution. There must be, since none has ever come out! Has it remained there through accident or necessity?

The attempts to coax it forth have been as the sands on the shore. They began almost as soon as the war was over. And here is a witness that they are still going on. But who remembers them? Let us name a few in New

York City. There was "Bunker Hill; or, The Death of General Warren," at the John Street Theater in 1797. Next came William Dunlap's "André," a year later. At the Park Theater in 1823 "Green Mountain Boys" was tried in February, "The Battle of Lexington" in July. There was "The Battle of Brandywine" at the Chatham Theater in 1856. The same year came "New York Patriots, or the Battle of Saratoga," at Barnum's, "with Continental uniforms and a considerable outlay in scenery." Edward Eddy used to play *Long Tom Coffin* in a Paul Jones drama in the 70's. In 1887 the late David Lloyd produced a play of old New York in Revolutionary war time, called "The Dominie's Daughter," at Wallack's. The scene was laid around Beekman Street. Kyrle Bellew was the star. Failure was the fate. Then later we saw Victor Mapes's attempt in "Capt. Barrington" to dramatize George Washington. James A. Herne wrote "The Minute Men" in the 80's. Clyde Fitch, who broke through into success with "Nathan Hale," failed dismally with "Major André." After the opening night of the latter piece, by the way, somebody said to the manager: "You might have known better. Spy plays always fail." "But how was I to know it was a spy play when I accepted it?" he

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answered. Even theatrical managers can't know everything.

This little list represents but a tithe of the attempts to make a play out of the Revolution. Yet not one of the dramas remains in the répertoire of the American theater, not one of them has risen above the moment to be dramatic literature, to perpetuate dramatically the historical background of our national life. That background is receding further and further into the mists of the past. To H. G. Wells, an Englishman, it seemed already as remote as the Wars of the Roses. To us, though tradition still lingers on in New England and hatred of the English is inculcated with every game of lead soldiers on the garden paths, it is growing sometimes almost as remote, and the Fourth of July perorations have a curious flavor of antiquity. In the early days of the last century, when memory of the struggle was still fresh and the nation was still trying its young limbs with the tingle of novelty in every leap and blow, grateful for its release, there were, no American dramatists with the technical skill to write any sort of drama. And now, when our dramatists have acquired or are acquiring the technical skill, the present is too full of problems, the future too engrossing, the past too remote, for them to be interested in the Revolution. We are at once too old and

not old enough as a nation to make copy of our past. Perhaps that is the real reason why the historical drama of 1776 does not get written.

An American student of the French Revolution has computed that if a man beginning in youth should read ten hours a day till he was ninety he could just get through the mass of material at present in print about that struggle. Much of this material was not written by Frenchmen, but the French have contributed their share, no little of it in the form of drama. Sardou in his later years turns back to this fruitful field. And some of these dramas have been no less popular in England and America than in France, no less popular than "The Only Way," the French Revolution seen through Dickens's sentimental spectacles. This does not mean that we Americans are more interested in the events of '93 than those of '76, even if they were more packed with blood and fury, full of a more concentrated and tumultuous rebellion. It simply means that the historic sense is more developed in French dramatists, fuses more harmoniously with the dramatic sense, and these dramas, of historic significance, to be sure, are also — and for us primarily — interesting and absorbing stage stories. Possibly it is easier to write a good play about the French Revolution than about ours —

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there is more material and vastly more examples to profit by. But the chief reason why better plays are written about it is that better minds are brought to bear on the task, it is regarded more seriously, treated with more historical knowledge, the result looked upon as a part of the great monument alike of French literature and French tradition. Neither toward our history nor our stage have we yet reached this standard. And until we do the drama of '76 is not likely to be coaxed forth.

When G. B. Shaw wrote "The Devil's Disciple" he was not so much minded to flatter us as to rap the British. The scene might quite as well have been laid in South Africa. G. B. evidently became enamored of "Gentlemanly Johnny" Burgoyne and wanted to use him in a play. In an amusing stage direction we read: "Burgoyne is boundlessly delighted by this retort [of Richard's], which almost reconciles him to the loss of America." Just how an actor is to express in pantomime reconciliation to the loss of America is not stated. But G. B.'s idea of American geography is rudimentary. Somehow or other the British under Burgoyne are in New Hampshire, where one of them says, "I will undertake to do what we have marched south (sic!) from Boston to do." They did not march from Boston, but Canada; they were in the New Hampshire "Grants,"

now Vermont, and Burgoyne was not with them. The town boasts of a Presbyterian church, which is almost as astonishing as Burgoyne's presence there. There is no nasal twang in the speech of the Yankees. They talk Shawese. This is n't a play of the American Revolution. It is just another toot of G. B.'s horn from his cart-tail. In his preface he gloats over the fact that when Mansfield produced "The Devil's Disciple" in America in 1897 we hailed it as original, when, as a matter of fact, its episodes, complications, all its melodramatic structure is old as — as melodrama. What has that got to do with the case? Nobody cared about its structure. A musician went to "Pelléas et Mélisande" at the Manhattan last winter, coming away to rave about Mary Garden and the drama. "But the music?" he was asked. "Oh, the music," said he — "the music did n't bother me." That's about the case with the story in "The Devil's Disciple." The wit, the equivoke, the "diabolonian ethics," the sense of a new, humorous and keenly alert mind playing over and about a subject were (with Mansfield's acting) what pleased us then, as they have pleased us since in other plays by G. B. Shaw. Being all Shaw they are all original. But by the same token, "The Devil's Disciple" is n't a play about the Revolution — it is n't an American historical drama.

But for all its historical inaccuracy, its lack of true color and atmosphere, its emphasis not on the American point of view but on the Shavian, it is the nearest thing we have to a Revolutionary War play, because it brings to bear on the subject more style and intelligence. Mr. Vroom marched his red coats in and out in "The Luck of Macgregor" with the same scene showing behind Fort George as behind Spuyten Duyvil. He did not even attempt to show that rounded end of Manhattan Island, that dome of rock and woods, which must look even to-day something as it did then save perhaps for the change to second growth timber — the only spot on our island that still speaks of the vanished days. Mr. Vroom not only failed to make a melodrama that hung together plausibly as Shaw's does, but he failed even more conspicuously than Shaw to create any true atmosphere or color. And as for wit or style or satire or character interest, his play was as barren as a musical comedy. At least *Dick Dudgeon*, if he primarily preaches Shavian philosophy, is fired by an under impulse of real patriotism. At least the Presbyterian parson, if he in reality should have been a Congregational Calvinist, glows with a hint of the passions that blazed up at Lexington and kept our army from freezing at Valley Forge. Perverse melodrama "The Devil's Disciple" may

be, and not American. But it is a man's play at any rate. It is grown up. It does not insult our Revolution, belittle our history. Such trivial, puerile, theatrical, pretty pasteboard and red-coated concoctions as "The Luck of Macgregor" do belittle our history, insult our Revolution. We are quite right in refusing to have anything to do with them.


But we are not right in supposing that because these bad plays fail to interest us all plays about our early struggle are doomed to failure. The American drama is just now waking up to look about with a man's eyes, to put ideas and speculations and comment where a few silly sentiments before did duty. Great Divides and Witching Hours are succeeding the trivialities of the past. The drama is waking up, too, thanks in no small measure to Mr. Belasco, to the charm and genuine interest of correct detail and atmosphere. Our stage, in other words, is reaching a point where a drama of the Revolution could be written and presented in a manner worthy of the theme and satisfactory to a public that are not always such fools as some folks would have us believe. It would be a drama in which the "ragged regimentals" of the Continental militia and the red coats of the British did not have to do duty at all times for the atmosphere; where the spy plot — its possibilities surely stretched



nearly to the end by Gillette in "Secret Service" — did not have to do duty for the story; where the passion for the cause of liberty was the true motive of action, not the traditional and silly "love motive" of conventional drama, and where the splendid characters of some of our early heroes found adequate expression and development. To write such a play is, less than ever as the past recedes, not a task for any but a first rate talent. And our men of first rate talents are just now too preoccupied with problems of the present to turn back into history for their themes. That is, no doubt, a healthful sign. But the busiest market-place is the better for a monument, none the less; the preservation of landmarks has more than a sentimental value. And dramas that shall worthily set forth our early history as a nation must, after all, be the basis of a national repertoire, if we are ever to have a national repertoire. England more fortunate, has in her repertoire classics of every period to perpetuate those periods on the stage. We in America had no drama of our own worthy of the name till very recent years. If we are to perpetuate our past at all we must reconstruct it. And because any task of historical reconstruction requires unusual knowledge and power, the drama of the Revolution is still unwritten. But sooner or later now, with the expansion of

ideas in the American theater, the development of adult consciousness in the native playwright, it is bound to come. Perhaps it will arrive in time to dedicate the National Theater. It is as easy to cherish two dreams as one!

AUDIENCES—A SPRING GROUCH



WAS it Richard Hovey who said that "Success is in the silences, though fame is in the song"? Those words came floating up in my memory as I sat at a performance of "The Governor and the Boss" in the Lincoln Square Theater, a home of the cheap stock company, starting a long train of suggestion and speculation that was hardly to be switched upon a siding even by the appearance of Mamma Spooner before the curtain to tell the audience what a fine company was hers. What roused the memory was the attitude of the audience toward the play. Few dramas are as interesting as the attitude of the audience toward them. In this case the attitude of the audience was, after the first act, all that was interesting. It was a curious audience, curious, that is, to one accustomed only to the theaters in the bright light district. Small girls and vacant chairs were in the majority. But the shrill pipings of infants could be heard here and there, presupposing the presence of mothers determined to escape in Art for the hour the petty bounds of domestic routine, even at the cost of disturbing other people. And

there were stout women who ate candy during and between the acts, a few wise eyed youths and some men. The play was quite new; hence, perhaps, the vacant chairs. But there was nothing new about Edna May Spooner, the star. Everybody knew her, palpitated with admiration at her entrance, accorded her hearty applause, and listened attentively and with no sign of disapproval to her monotonous, artificial manner of speech.


As the drama got under way, disclosing itself as an attempt, however inadequate and clumsy, to reproduce modern political conditions on the stage, the attitude of this audience if not one of baffled intelligence was at least one of impassivity, of tolerant expectation. Girls and mothers, chocolate cream fattened females and wise eyed youths waited patiently for the "love scenes," the "comic relief," the "emotional situations" instinct and experience taught them would eventually come. The part of the *Boss* was very well played. In act one the *Boss* came to see young *Graham*, Independent candidate for Governor, and *Graham* burst out into an oration denouncing him, declaring that he would never withdraw in favor of the regular party candidate. The *Boss* waited impassively till he was done. "Are you all through orating?" he asked dryly. "Then let's really talk." And he quietly

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spiked the reformer's guns by stating that he had called to announce the withdrawal of his candidate, not to suggest the withdrawal of *Graham*. It was a scene capitably conceived, disclosing the essential characteristics of each man by means of speech or action, and shrewdly humorous in its unexpected twist of climax. Yet the audience, though giving it their attention inevitably, were not roused to mirth, and their faces betrayed no overwhelming signs of stimulated intelligence.

But, see! What has happened? Suddenly their faces are alight, they lean forward, laughter sways them; they are transfigured into vital attention, stirred, aroused. Has a great emotional actor or a great comedian suddenly appeared upon the stage? No, *Tommy*, the fresh office boy, has entered in trousers too tight for him and he is down by the footlights talking slang and making "mugs" at the house. The "comic relief" has at last arrived. Here is something the audience can understand, something they are accustomed to. What does it matter if the actor who plays *Tommy* is grossly out of the picture, if he ridiculously over-acts, if his mouth is twisted and spread into a caricature of the mask of comedy? He is the hero of the moment. The *Boss* is forgotten. His is the fame.

Yes, success is in the silences. And how much difference, one fell to wondering, is there after all between this audience at the Lincoln Square, with its narrow little range of appreciation, its pitifully limited capacity of understanding and criticism, and the audiences further south on Broadway, where fame is in a song about "Bill Simmons" and the magnificent success of Sothern's impersonation of *Don Quixote* is in the deep, deep silence of theatrical failure? Critics utter their shrill complaints; dramatists, managers, and actors are rapped and roasted; a famous European writer says, "in America the dramatic art has shrunk to a low and exceedingly vulgar level"; we wail that we have no native poetic drama and next to no prose drama. Yet do we not receive quite as good theatrical fare as we deserve? Let us in this glad season of flower garden hats, benefit performances, timid violets and fresh asphalt permit the dramatists, actors and managers to rest a while in peace and have a look at ourselves — be critical of audiences.



A friend of the writer who spends his life in doing good deeds among poor and rich alike and so has little time for the theater, went the other evening to one of our most successful plays. There he met a man and woman of his acquaintance and after the play they invited him to supper, being, like the average husband

and wife of Christendom, glad of company to relieve the monotony of existence. They took him to one of the most popular of the Rialto cafés and "ordered something." As the room began to fill up he noted with amazement that they knew after a fashion half the people there. It was a strange kind of community, knit by the single bond of nightly theater parties and nightly meetings later at some café. With growing astonishment he learned that his friends had tickets to the theater for every remaining evening that week. As they talked a third man, a broker, came over and joined them. He had been to "The Servant in the House." "It's a good play," he said, "and I ought to know. I've been to the theater about a hundred and fifty times in the last year."

"Good heavens! Why?" said the writer's friend.

"Why not?" said the broker.

"What would you have us do?" said the husband and wife.

"What would you have us do?" — is n't that the heart of the problem, or very close to the heart of the problem? When home becomes the last resort art becomes the first, and neither profits. There are in the Broadway district alone a quarter of a hundred theaters, which represent an investment of millions of dollars, which nightly cater to at least thirty

thousand people, which employ thousands of actors and stage hands and mechanics and ushers and scene painters and costumers. Nightly through the Alley is the roll of carriages, the flash of jewels, the endless parade beneath the electric letters of the theater portals, the endless parade out again, and then the gleam and smoke and clatter of restaurants and cafés. How strange, how bewildering, how meaningless it would all seem to the meditative Martian, descended from his planet, where life must be quiet and sedate, with so many canals! Yet it is not meaningless; it is fraught with a very grave meaning. It represents an eternal hectic effort to escape boredom. The Alley by night is a brilliant battle-ground, and Time is the arch enemy. What is an extra dollar or two paid to a nasty speculator on the curb and cheerfully accepted by the doorman in spite of the six foot high warning beside him (he deals in tickets himself of an afternoon, maybe) when three "golden" hours, which in reality are only plated, can thus be laid low? Some thousands of these theatergoers are visitors to town. They are "seeing the sights," or they have been buying dry goods supplies all day and must fill in the evening, or they are gleefully dragging the skirts of a supposedly Puritan propriety through the dirt of a supposedly naughty Tenderloin, with a musical

comedy as a preliminary canter. Some other thousands are genuine New Yorkers; that is, they were born in Danbury, Conn., or Spokane, Wash., and now live in layers on Manhattan Island, planning to go back home again some day — which they never do. Still others reside in Brooklyn. See them run for the subway when the play is out. Enough of them will be squeezed and shoved into a three car local at Times Square to fill a seven car express at the Grand Central. However, they will all get home before morning. And all of these thousands the theaters swallow up at eight every evening and disgorge at eleven, day after day, week after week. Millions of dollars pour into the box offices. Dancers gyrate and sweat; actors strut and pose and supply columns of the papers with unimportant gossip; naval lieutenant tenors adventure on the high C; managers watch and plan. And yet we have no drama. And yet “the powerful and complex æsthetic pleasures of a work of art” are to be found in but a scant half dozen theaters at best. And yet the thinness and poverty of our theatrical fare are only emphasized by the unprecedentedly enormous demand for theatrical entertainment.

In plain language, we go to the theater not to secure “the powerful and complex æsthetic pleasures of a work of art,” not to see our life reflected on the stage, commented upon, ex-

plained to us, not for the uplift and release of poetry — but simply because we have n't anything else to do. When a man goes to the theater because he has n't anything else to do he is not in a condition to pick his play with much discrimination, except vaguely to avoid "anything high brow," whatever that may mean. And when this is his attitude, when all he asks is that he shall not be bored, where is the encouragement, the stimulus, either to author or manager, to give him more? There is subtle truth in "The Witching Hour." The earnest wishing of five hundred thousand citizens cannot perhaps break through sealed doors and dictate the verdict of a jury. But the wishes and desires of a million playgoers cannot fail to shape the drama that is written for them. Let them but wish another "Witching Hour" from Mr. Thomas and it will surely come. Even a Theatrical Syndicate cannot stop it.

Moreover, when a man goes to the theater a hundred and fifty times in a year because he has nothing else to do, when he makes the playhouse but the spoil of listless hours, it means with deadly sureness that he has no intellectual resources in himself. The psychological problems, the complexities of choice and conduct, the thousand and one questions raised by our modern social and industrial conditions, which are the material for a native drama, cannot be

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known to him, surely cannot interest him, or he could not find one hundred and fifty plays in New York in a season that he could voluntarily endure to sit through. Since these problems are unknown to him he does not demand that the drama tackle them; he would be perplexed, astonished, very likely bored if it did. "High brow!" would probably be his contemptuous commentary. The "tired American business man" (who evidently has also a weary wife) has prattled asininely for some time—or somebody has prattled for him—that he wants when evening comes "to be amused," he needs "relaxation." And his is not the only class to utter this chatter. In reality the statement carries its own damnation, for it is simply an admission that what amuses him is coarseness, frivolity, falseness and bad art, that he knows nothing and cares less about the relaxation of genuine drama, the spiritual uplift and strengthening of a true æsthetic emotion. His is a confession that his brain is pitifully narrow and one sided, incapable of paying attention to more than one branch of serious human endeavor, impervious to culture, dead to art. He makes out a pretty bad case against himself. If it is half as bad as he admits, it is bad enough.

As a matter of fact we have too many theaters, too many actors, too many plays on

Manhattan Island. But as we also have too many people matters are not likely to be mended by subtraction. Two very pleasant features of a civilized existence are impossible where there are so many people — neighbors and homes. Many neighbors mean no neighbors; and "Paid in Full" is eloquent testimony to the somewhat restricted existence in the average flat. Down on the East Side, where we go to carry sweetness and light, seldom dreaming we might find a bit there for our own use, the Jews have contrived to maintain a certain community interest; and the Jews have a drama — a vital, flourishing drama that is a part of their lives. The New York Public Library branches cannot keep Ibsen's plays on the shelves; they are in constant demand. And if you ask the librarians who read these plays they answer, "The Jews." It is the People's Institute that largely supports Shakespeare in this city, that put "The Man of the Hour" on its feet, that has helped swing "The Servant in the House" into the high road of success. To these people going to the theater means a sacrifice. They cannot go a hundred and fifty times in a year. And when they do go they go for a better purpose than to kill time. Probably most successful dramas — successful in the better sense of providing real æsthetic pleasure, of offering notable acting or serious discussion — are sup-

ported after the first few weeks by people to whom the price of a ticket means a sacrifice. It is the men and women who cannot have what they want who want the best. So, though the meditative Martian, reflecting on what he saw, might wing back to his canals disgusted with our Alley, we need not pull a long face after all, since the prospect of an overwhelming proportion of the population securing the means to get what they want when they want it is so remote, such an Utopian dream (if it would not rather prove the opposite of Utopian), that it need not worry us. Below the glitter and the hectic flight from boredom that seems to the casual glance as the essence of Broadway by night is always to be detected the undercurrent, fed from a thousand sources, of those who go to the theater not to kill time but to use it, of those who seek the relaxation not of lingerie and lights but of æsthetic and intellectual emotions.

After all, the wise man will not ask for much more than this. He will admit without scolding the right of narrower minds to their narrower entertainments, and he will not hug the delusion of universal reformation. Only he ~~will urge the further division of theaters and managers into classes, so that the character of an entertainment may be guaranteed by the house where it is produced, and eventually per-~~

haps the endowment of at least one theater in every large city where a wide répertoire of the best drama is constantly played for the delight and instruction of all who care to come, whether they be many or few. At present our stage is conducted for the "common average," which here, as anywhere else, as in the school-room, for instance, works hardship for the few. What we need is a manager who cares so little for money that he believes in the divine right of the minority. And the broker who has been to the theater one hundred and fifty times in one season did see "The Servant in the House" the last time. One real thing, at least, in one hundred and fifty! Perhaps that is n't so bad a percentage. Perhaps the wise man will be grateful for the one and forget the rest. That is the part of philosophy. Let us revert to the pretty, formal little affectation of our grandfathers and close with a bit of poetry. Once in a while a bit of poetry leaves a pleasant taste in the mouth, even if the present mission of poetry is to fill out the blank space on a magazine page. And why not the rest of that verse we began with?

Have little care that Life is brief,
 And less that Art is long;
 Success is in the silences,
 Though fame is in the song.

CROWDS AND MR. HAMILTON

M GUSTAVE LE BON once wrote a book called "The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind," since when every psychologist and every academic student can tell you that "a man by the mere fact that he forms part of an organized crowd descends several rungs on the ladder of civilization"; that all legislative bodies, though composed of intelligent men, are collectively no better than children or barbarians; that all theater audiences, even though composed of men and women of culture and refinement, by the "law of the crowd," possess as collective bodies neither culture nor refinement, are interested only in the most primitive emotions, delight only in blood and carnage, in horse-play or hysterics. Clayton Hamilton, a man who takes his own brain to the theater but thinks nobody else does, and who has written a piece about it* called "The Psychology of Theater Audiences," has been earnestly reading Le Bon's book, as A. B. Walkley of the "London Times" evidently read it before him. And Mr. Hamilton, ignoring his own attitude

* The Forum, October, 1907.

when a unit in a theatrical audience, and ignoring also the very possible supposition that maybe some hundreds of other folks around him are in the same attitude, swallows Le Bon at a single gulp and boldly assures us that "even the most cultured and intellectual of men when he forms an atom of a crowd loses consciousness of his acquired mental qualities and harks back to his primal nakedness of mind. The dramatist, therefore, because he writes for a crowd, writes for an uncivilized and uncultivated mind, a mind richly human, vehement in approbation, violent in disapproval, easily credulous, eagerly enthusiastic, boyishly heroic, and carelessly unthinking."

Now, there's only one trouble with this statement — it is n't true. It's one of those most pernicious of things, a half truth. It is an out and out affirmation of a very much qualified fact, just as Le Bon's work, which was, without question, a great contribution to psychology, none the less constantly and at times violently exaggerated, as was natural, perhaps, in the work of a man possessed by a new theory. No one denies Le Bon's main contention that an organized crowd tends always to absorb the personal traits of the men who compose it and to assume a great, comprehensive new consciousness of its own, a consciousness made up of the common traits of the individual atoms,

not of their differences. And as men possess in common certain primal and racial passions, beliefs, instincts, rather than intellectual over-beliefs and judgments, the mind of the crowd tends always to be credulous, emotional, easily swayed by passion and not at all by judgment. There does n't a man exist who cannot testify to this from his own experience, who has not at some time or other, in a crowd — a gang of sophomores hazing, a political convention, what not — done something he would not have done in cold blood by himself — cheered or hooted with the rest at some sentiment that his personal judgment would, if left to itself, have received in the opposite way, “descended several rungs on the ladder of civilization.” The mistake lies in supposing that all crowds always — especially Anglo-Saxon crowds — so absorb the identity of the atoms which compose them. They may always tend to, but they by no means always succeed. And in no crowd is the absorption so likely to be incomplete as in the theater audiences which gather in the better play-houses of a large city.

Indeed, if we must be psychological let us be psychological in the only ultimate way and indulge in a little introspection. Mr. Hamilton himself does not admit that he becomes a barbarian in the play-house; we do not get a picture of him scrambling hastily down

the ladder of civilization as the asbestos curtain rises. No, rather do we see him perching perkily on the very top, exulting that he was the only member of an audience in the middle West who appreciated the lyric quality of "Othello." And if you or I set our minds to the task of recalling some evening in the play-house we shall find that while the woman next to us was weeping we were wondering why, or while we were listening to some speech with a lump in our throat the man behind us was snickering. Undoubtedly there are times in the theater when we laugh because a laugh sweeps over the audience, or are thrilled by contagion. But for the most part those of us who have reached a certain scale of intelligence and achieved a certain standard of taste sit in the theater more or less oblivious to the crowd around us, getting our ideas and emotions directly from the stage. Mr. Walkley and Mr. Hamilton and the rest who have found in *Le Bon* what seems to them a scientific justification for the old academic bugaboo of "primitive passions," of "appeal to the great masses" in the drama, all admit the presence in the orchestra chairs of certain chosen people who keep themselves detached, who retain their own identities. Sometimes these paragons are called critics. But how can anybody stroll in the lobby of a Broadway

play-house between the acts without realizing that half the audience are critics, lacking only the chance to blot white paper with black ink? There are as many differences of opinion on the first night of a new play as there are people in the house. And they are not minor differences, but fundamental ones — this man liking the play, that loathing it. There is no great mob judgment of the play. The truth is that this dear old theory about the inevitable necessity of the dramatist to deal in primitive passions, to paint in raw colors, to appeal only to the broad, fundamental instincts and emotions of the race, to simplify the psychology of his characters till each wears a label of goodness or badness as big as the number on the back of a Vanderbilt cup racer, is a relic of "the spacious times of great Elizabeth," that were in some ways about as narrow as well could be. It is a theory still in part true, of course; true, certainly, of Eighth Avenue, true of the Broadway balconies (when there is anybody in them), true to a minor extent of the lower parts of the house. But the increased education, the more catholic and subtle tastes, the greater sophistication and training in appreciation of art of the modern man and woman have already smashed great breaches in the wall of this theory and are every day making it less tenable. Mr. Hamilton is n't the

only man who goes into the theater without checking his personal intelligence and refinement at the coat room — aye, even in New York, even in our merry, care-free, speculator infested little White Alley!

“When a progressive stage society is started,” says Mr. Hamilton, “it usually damns itself in the beginning by giving a special performance of ‘The Master Builder.’ How can it hope to uplift the crowd with a play that the crowd cannot with any effort understand?” And then he cries, “Why should we waste our money and our energy trying to make the crowd come to see ‘The Master Builder’?”

We shall have to refer him to Mme. Nazimova for an answer. She will tell him pertinently that she did n’t waste any money, that she took it in hand over fist at the box office window. Perhaps she would add that she did n’t, however, make “the crowd,” in his sense, come to the Bijou Theater at all, that in a city of four or five millions of people there are conceivably various grades of taste and intelligence, which do not mix in the playhouse in a great, heterogeneous mass, but which seek each its own level of enjoyment; and conceivably there is a grade capable of finding enjoyment in Ibsen numerous enough to fill the Bijou Theater for some few weeks, while another grade is having the time of its life at

the Rogers Brothers. At any rate, there were the audiences at "The Master Builder" every night, and packed in at the matinées (Mr. Hamilton goes Hugo one better in his low opinion of women as auditors in a theater). There is the fact. What is Mr. Hamilton going to do about it?

In his article he says, "The trouble with most of the dreamers who league themselves for the uplifting of the stage is that they take the theater too seriously. [The theater audience] seeks amusement . . . amusement through laughter, sympathy, terror and tears." In the name of the Muses shall we never have done with this academic distinction between the stage and the other arts, this condescending patronage bestowed on the poor play-house by the learned gentlemen who walk beneath college elms and appreciate the poetry of Shakespeare while the vulgar mob, of course, know nothing about it? If any actor or any manager or any critic does n't take the theater seriously he'd better get out of it. If any man in any profession does n't take his work seriously he's wasting his time, and his plain duty is to get out and hoe corn or saw wood or otherwise engage himself in some occupation worthy of his ideals. As a matter of fact, amusing people is the most serious business in the world. And, as a matter of fact, the man

who does it through the drama is n't obliged to be any less strict with his artistic conscience, any more lax in his ideals of truth and beauty than the man who does it through the novel or the symphony or the statue. Are not musical audiences as much a "crowd" as theatrical audiences? But did Mozart or Beethoven have to select tunes that the "primitive whistle" could gleefully compass for the themes of their symphonies? Do the Kneisels have to play music which an audience at the Casino would enjoy? The word "amusement" needs redefining. Like a good many other words, it needs redefining at least once a generation. Plays that "amused" our fathers don't amuse us; plays that amuse you don't amuse me. What does each of us mean? In Shakespeare's day it meant to be entertained by a story. In our day, for a great many of us, ~~probably including Mr. Hamilton~~, it means to be shown a little more clearly, a little more fully, the meaning and the mystery of our human lives, their complexities and problems, their hopes and fears. And one of these complexities is the breaking up of society into rough intellectual classes, so that two plays of widely different appeal may be shown on opposite sides of Broadway and each find audiences that secure from it the peculiar form of enjoyment their taste and culture demand. The time is already at hand when

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the "primitive psychology" of the crowd need not be a bugaboo for the ambitious and earnest dramatist who feels in his heart of hearts that there are other things amusing beside sitting in a squash pie or choking your wife to death in a jealous fury.

OBSERVATION IN THE DRAMA

A CERTAIN well-known actress recently said that she admired a certain other well-known actress. "Why?" somebody asked her, perhaps not unreasonably surprised. "Because," said she, "she does so wonderfully well those things that — that nobody ever does!" This is the feminine of David Warfield's assertion that too many actors imitate not life but other actors. And what is true of the players is equally true of the playwrights. The old brown tree theory in painting has its counterpart in play-making. The artist who takes his canvas out of doors, the dramatist who writes with his eye on life, are alike refreshing.

If any proof of this were needed it is to be found in Clyde Fitch's farce, "Girls." Whatever Mr. Fitch's faults may be, lack of observation is not one of them. He goes through life with his eyes open; his mind must be a stored note-book of impressions. His men and women are not forever doing the same old things, saying the same old words, trotting out the same old pack of tricks. They do things, they say things which reflect the life around

us and in a thousand little ways connect Mr. Fitch's dramas with actualities. Thus the surface texture of a Fitch play is always surprising and delightful; it seems fresh. When his girls modestly retire to the folding bed, the couch and the Morris chair respectively, settling down for slumber, there is a sudden diabolical thumping in the steam-pipes — a little thing, but how painfully real to every flat dweller in the audience! The comic effect of this single small touch of observation is surprisingly large. Again, the hero builds a bridge across the air-shaft with a blind — a patent bridge for cliff dwellers, he calls it, hitting off our unholy fashion of existence in New York with an epithet — and the blind falls down. It does n't fall a few feet to the stage. You hear it bumping from side to side down all four stories that are supposed to be there, and then comes the crash of broken glass. Mr. Fitch has looked down one of these flat-house air-shafts and seen the skylight at the bottom. And to you, sitting in the audience, comes the picture too, and you actually feel that room on the stage to be four stories up. The illusion is very pleasant — illusion always is. You are delighted to have your imagination stirred into doing a little work, into helping the playwright build his scene.

Mr. Fitch sends one of his girls out for

provisions. He has observed what girls eat on such occasions (or somebody has told him, and he remembered). A titter runs through the audience as the packages are undone. Somebody is being hit here! Then there are the hairpins in the match-box; and the funny little confectionery bride atop the wedding cake (in what East Side bakeshop window did Mr. Fitch see that as he was strolling by to store away the memory in a corner of his brain?); and the "elocutionist" who sings "Love Me and the World is Mu-ine!" the one and only song for her to sing, sung in the one and only way to sing it: and the silly married lady who, blocked in her pursuit of her husband by one of those office gates which have the real catch on the under side of the apparent lock, gives up the attempt to solve the puzzle and climbs over the gate with that comical awkwardness of the sex aware of their ankles. Most of us have seen a woman straddle a gate and smiled. Mr. Fitch knew we would smile at it in a play. It would be easy to multiply examples of this sort; every spectator of "Girls" can see them for himself. Taken together they are what give to the play in no small measure its freshness and charm; they help to make it real, to connect it with the lives of those in the audience, to arouse pleasant associations, to pique mildly the imagination. And they are all the result

of Mr. Fitch's gift of observation, his feel for the surface texture of life, his habit of keeping his eyes open not only in the theater but outside of it.

George Ade is another playwright possessed of the seeing eye, "the eye for copy" it would be called in a newspaper shop; "the daily theme eye" it is called by the Harvard English department. Before he wrote for the stage Mr. Ade's "Fables in Slang" had carried his fame abroad, because of their delicious observation, their humorous rendering of certain phases of life, particularly life in smaller towns. Even to-day Ade is best appreciated by the man reared in a small town. The foibles he most keenly exposes are the foibles of the village. The tale of the two youths in "Artie" — poor, ill-fated, delightful "Artie" — who went to the Union No. 19 ball, and of how they there "picked up" the heroine, is not to be flavored by your more sophisticated dweller on the Avenue, who does not know that the game of chance acquaintance has its etiquette but no impropriety. The faintest suspicion of impropriety would have ruined the truth of this scene. "The College Widow," of course, was one long exhibition of delicious observations, from the big guard, whose patent leather shoe "bound just across the instep," to the boarding-house keeper's daughter and the "widow"

herself, who wore a new fraternity pin each season. Indeed, just because Mr. Ade does go through life with his eyes open, just because he is interested in the men and women about him, he is able to tap new springs of theatrical supply, to avoid the stale, the overworked, the conventional in the theater, bringing something fresh and new to the stage. "The College Widow" was hailed as new even by those people who could not know that it was true, who could not appreciate its quiet little jabs of satire, its amiable, even affectionate, rendering of life in a small college. It is not his slang that makes Mr. Ade's work popular with intelligent people. George Cohan can write slang. Certainly it is not his skill as a play constructor, since his skill in that direction is conspicuous only by its absence. It is his freshness, the unworn, unhackneyed quality of his texture and material. And he has this freshness because Mr. Ade keeps his eyes open. And Mr. Ade keeps his eyes open because his universe is not bounded by the Flatirons; he loves life anywhere he meets it, loves to watch it, to render it, to catch up some faint echo of the amusement it gives him into his plays, that others may be amused as he is. That is the secret of the fresh charm of his work, that the source of its vitality.

J. M. Barrie, perhaps, of all living English-

speaking playwrights, best illustrates the power of observation in the drama. No man has tapped a more varied source of supply than he, and no man has brought to the stage a wider range of novel material. The village of Thrums, the Quality Street of Jane Austen's time, the Never-never-never land of childish fairy tale, the English drawing-room of to-day, with the life below stairs shown in comical contrast, are alike subjects for his plays, and alike handled with the most faithful and loving truth. How did Barrie come to write "Peter Pan"? Did he say, "Go to, I will write a play for children. Pens, ink, and paper, boy!" Hardly. He walked with his dog in Kensington Gardens; he told tales to the children there. He got acquainted with the ducks. He learned where *Peter* lived, on the island. Finally he met the Little White Bird, and that was the little bird that whispered the secret of the play in his ear, or rather of the book. The play came later. *Nana* is unnatural history only to those who have never watched dogs. The play fails of appeal only to those who do not remember their own childhood or who have not lived it again with little children. Even such a slight thing as *Smee's* sewing machine illustrates Barrie's eternal watchfulness. He and Mr. Frohman had gone down to Manchester to see the first "provincial" produc-

tion of the play. They were walking along the street in the afternoon when Barrie suddenly stopped to gaze into a window. A man was sitting there sewing at a machine. Barrie grinned. "What is it?" asked Mr. Frohman. "Why, don't you see?" laughed the author. "*Smee* must have a sewing machine — it's so incongruous." And that night he had his machine and the audience roared.

"The Admirable Crichton," so different from "Peter Pan," so profoundly philosophical beneath its whimsicality, is conceived in terms of the most rigid and solid drama, its most effective moment being pantomime — the moment at the end of the second act when the aristocrats who have revolted from the rule of the butler come stealing sheepishly back in the darkness, drawn by the magic odor of the pot on the fire. And this solidity is due to what? To Mr. Barrie's faithful observation. The servants sitting ill at ease in the lord's parlor for their monthly dose of "equality"; the butler on the desert island become king because he is the one who knows how to build fires, make houses, cook the food, meet the primitive necessities; the aristocrats back again in London assuming once more their superior position while the butler no less readily assumes his by bowing his shoulders and rubbing his hands again in the old, submissive way, all are indi-

cated for the eye almost without the aid of speech, and indicated because Barrie knew what he was drawing, worked from the living model. His observation was minute and patient and seemingly unbounded. He knew how butlers—rub their hands, how the social castes below stairs divide themselves, how servants sit when they are trying to appear at ease in a drawing-room, how Mayfair makes epigrams or holds its head up haughtily or gets hungry on a desert island, like the rest of us. Other men could have worked out the logical scheme of "The Admirable Crichton" as well as Barrie; Shaw no doubt could have worked it out no less wittily. But no other living playwright could have made it not alone so humane and kindly and sweet, but so real. For no other playwright has watched men and women so closely and so lovingly, remembering their little tricks and attitudes, their pet phrases and personal humors, their oddities of dress and speech and thought. It is n't Barrie's fault if he does this. He cannot help it. That's the way the Lord made him—a lover of his fellow men for their own sakes, not for the sake of putting them into a play. He probably gets as much fun out of his material before his plays are written as we do afterward.

And what a pity it is, as A. B. Walkley has pointed out, that Shaw is so entirely lacking

in just this quality of observation. Probably few people have failed to experience a kind of disappointment, a sense of vague lack, even at the most brilliant of Shaw's comedies. They get to the head, but not below it; they inspire laughter without warmth or glow; there is something unreal about them, even about "Candida," for they leave the emotions untouched. "The ordinary everyday surface of the universe is to him," says Mr. Walkley, "only a springboard from which he jumps into the space of ratiocination — his own peculiar space, a space of four dimensions." Perish the imputation that this passionate Fabian, this paradoxical Socialist, does not love his fellow men! G. B. S. loves us one and all. But he is too burdened with the mission of correcting us, of making the straight places of our philosophy crooked, of supplying us with theories and shattering our romantic ideals, to take any interest in the mere surface details of our lives. He could never sit in his club window and watch the passing throng. If he should walk in Kensington Gardens he would ask the ducks why they were n't swans. There is none of Mr. Barrie's loving, patient rendering of minute detail in his dramas, because he is n't interested in such detail in life. Therefore "The Admirable Crichton," which is quite as profoundly philosophical as anything Shaw

has written, is also a thousand times more real.

To come back to Broadway, "Paid in Full" admirably illustrates in its first act just this quality of observation; and surely it is more than chance that as the truth of observation grows dim the drama grows more and more theatric and conventional. The humors of a Harlem flat (for a Harlem flat may have its humors, to the onlooker at least!), the young husband with the carpet sweeper, the dumb-waiter, the speaking tube, the paper-hanger's mess, the grocery bills, the petty economies in light and fuel give to that admirable opening act a tang of reality that is lacking later, when the machinery of the story gets to creaking and the characters become puppets for the purposes of the play. Mr. Walter, however, never quite loses his gift of observation. There are touches of it in his "semi-fashionable" hotel; it gleams again in the setting for *Capt. Williams's* apartment, and in the *Captain's* conversation with his servant. And every fitful gleam arouses a response in the audience that ought to show plainly enough how priceless a gift it is for the playwright, especially the man who would make dramas of contemporary life.

Emerson once remarked, possibly not without a touch of that local self-sufficiency which still may be found in Concord, Massachusetts,

that the traveler to Europe finds nothing there he does not take with him. Alas! the playwright finds nothing in life either that he does not bring with him. After all, you cannot go forth saying "I will discover a new corner of life to exploit on the stage," with any hope of success. It is the old fable of the two shepherds who sought the magic flower. Once upon a time a reporter, lacking an assignment, went down to the Battery and sat on the sea-wall, bemoaning the injustice of the Fates who would not bring about a subway accident or a bomb explosion or a four alarm fire to swell his slender space bill. The sun was warm. The lazy tide ran by, bearing on its bosom many strange things out to sea. And the reporter had the curiosity of his kind. He forgot his hard lot in the pleasant pastime of watching the strange burdens of the tide. Presently he was taking notes. A couple of hours later he strolled back to Park Row and wrote a column. "It's a low tide," he said, "that brings no space." And it's a pretty poor corner of life that will yield no drama. But that drama is not to be had for the asking. The seeing eye must discover it, the faithful hand transcribe. It must be observed first for its own sake, loved for its own sake. And that is only possible when the playwright has almost the painter's childish delight in the form and color

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and movement of the universe and the healthy man's warm-hearted interest in the doings of his fellows. Mr. Barrie could not have created *Nana* if he did n't like dogs, nor *Crichton* if he lacked a fraternal interest in butlers. George Ade could never have written "The College Widow" if he had gone through college with his nose in a book. Academic courses in the technique of the drama, patient study of Euripides and Shakespeare, Molière and Congreve are all very well. But the young loafer who lounges around the pool room in his club and smokes too plenteous pipes of good fellowship in unscholastic chat with his kind may be closer to the right track, after all — which is a dangerous doctrine for undergraduates!

THE GRAPHOMANIA MIMETICA

INSPIRED by the far-reaching results which have followed two recent theses for the doctor's degree at Cambridge, one on "The longitudinal vibrations of a piece of rubbed string" and the other on "The place of vision in the mental life of the mouse," a friend of ours has for some time past been working in his private laboratory, and soon he will give to the world a monograph on "The effect on the cellular organism of a guinea pig of the bacillus graphomania mimetica." He has, after months of patient labor, succeeded in isolating this deadly microbe, and has several tubes filled with the cultures, which multiply in the temperature of Broadway at a prodigious rate. We have been permitted to look at this microbe through a powerful magnifying glass. It is a horrid bug, yellow, striped with black. We shuddered as we looked at it and made sure to wash our hands with carbolic and to disinfect our clothes. But the scientist seems to handle the cultures quite without fear, and now he is looking for human beings to experiment on. The trouble, he says, is not to find people willing to undergo an injection, but to

find anybody who has n't already at least a taint of the disease in his blood. Naturally he tried first in the colleges; but the undergraduates turned out the worst class of all. One drop of blood from a Harvard senior disclosed on analysis 3,400,271 microbes, and even in the women's colleges the contagion was almost as bad. If there is anybody who has never written so much as the first act of a play and has never felt the slightest itch to write a play, this scientist would be grateful for his or her name and address. But in spite of his inability to find hitherto a perfectly healthy human being on whom to experiment, and in spite of his inability to find any agent that will kill the germ without also killing the victim (marriage will often cure love, but production seems only to heighten the play writing fever), our scientific friend has yet been able to draw a few pretty certain conclusions regarding the disease that can hardly fail to be of interest.

One of the symptoms which usually (though not always) distinguishes the play writing fever from authoritis in general is the presence in the victim of hallucinations, closely akin on the one hand to the morbid idea that the world is in a conspiracy against one — a common form of incipient insanity — and on the other to exaggerated egotism. To what lengths the first

form of the hallucinations will lead a victim is well illustrated by a playwright who not long ago wrote a furious letter to a certain manager declaring that his play had not been read. He knew it had n't because he sprinkled sand between pages thirteen and fourteen, and the sand was still there when the manuscript came back to him! Managers don't read the plays submitted to them, he hotly affirmed. They produce only the work of foreigners or dramatists who have "arrived." The Great America Drama comes knocking at their door and they send word they are out. The second phase of the hallucinations is also illustrated by this same case. The playwright was totally incapable of comprehending that perhaps it was enough to read twelve pages of his play to find out that it was unfit for the stage. As somebody once took the trouble to say, "You don't have to eat the whole of an egg to discover that it's rotten." There was never a playwright yet who did not feel confident that his play was great, who did not know that it "united the technique of Ibsen with the amusing surface detail of Fitch," as a budding young dramatist said to us only yesterday while enthusiastically describing his latest masterpiece. This same young bud had a play produced not very long ago; and that, we admit, ought to be an argument for the stupidity of

managers, though he arrives at his conclusion concerning the mental capacity of the powers that produce by quite another logical route. This play was a dire failure. Not one of the characters was alive, not one of them spoke human speech, not for a moment did the drama convince, not once did it disclose the trace of a talent. But was he purged of his fever? Far from it! He laid the blame on the actors and the stage management, and went blithely to work on a second masterpiece!

Now, nothing can be more certain than that this man does not know how to write a play, or, better, that he has not the quality and force of imagination to conceive a story in terms of the theater. He can and has written fiction of some merit and charm. He cannot and never will write a play. But the fatal germ is in his veins, the nasty little yellow bug is eating at his tissues. And incapacitated for self-criticism as a result, deluded, wrapped up now in his dream, he goes right on trying, and will go right on trying till the Ultimate Disappointment. Doubtless the malign influence of the lady of the winged wheel is at work here, and in all such cases, to some extent. When a poor pen pusher to whom five cents a word is a dream of avarice reads that Charles Klein has made half a million dollars from "The Lion and the Mouse," or that Fitch's royalties have

mounted in a single year into six figures, it is easy and natural for him to convince himself that he too can write a play. The fact that he knows nothing about the theater, that he has never trained his mind to think in terms of the stage, that the dramatic medium is not the medium proper to his imagination, does not deter him in the slightest. So he writes the play, and back it comes to him from manager after manager. And does it occur to him that perhaps these men, who after all have had quite as much experience in the theater as he, know a little what they are about, that possibly his play is unfit for the stage? Far otherwise! It occurs to him that they are all fools and the world a brutal place, unappreciative of true talent. So he continues to heed the beckoning finger of the lady of the winged wheel.

Our friend the scientist, who it may be guessed is not unacquainted with the practical theater, for the sake of thoroughness in his investigations studies not only the victims of the disease but their fever products. To that end during the past year or two he read many score of manuscripts that poured into the managers' offices. He states positively that forty-eight out of fifty could be rejected on a reading of the first act, thirty out of fifty on a reading of ten pages, and at least twenty out of fifty on a bare reading of the cast and scene plot.

Perhaps not one in a hundred had to be read through to the end. They were read through to the end always in the hope that some good idea, some gleam of talent, might be discovered and encouraged; but it was not necessary for the rejection of that particular play. Musical comedies bristling with bad puns, impossible lyrics and naval lieutenants who sing tenor; poor, feeble copies of the latest Broadway success; plays without points and plays without joints — by the hundreds they pour in upon the managers. And always this is their lesson, that the people who write them have no business trying to write for the stage; in the good old-fashioned phrase they have not been "called." They have got the little yellow bug into their systems and are sufferers from disease. The wonder is not that the managers produce so few good plays, but so many; that they contrive to pick out any sheep from such an endless herd of goats.

Perhaps the difference between the born artist, who writes poems or paints pictures or builds plays (plays are built, not written), because the dear Lord willed it so, and the fellow who does it because he has got a microbe into his system, is shown, the scientist says, most clearly in the temper with which either man suffers a rejection. Stevenson, you will recall, records that if his "stuff" was returned to him

in his early years, why, then, he told himself, he had not learned to write, and he went cheerfully back to his practice. And such practice! He imitated everybody. He wrote and rewrote and rewrote again and then tore up. He "played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne; to Montaigne, to Baudelaire and to Obermann." "In 'Monmouth,' a tragedy," he says, "I reclined on the bosom of Mr. Swinburne." Finally, after years of such patient toil, he began to know how to write. The born dramatist too is well aware that his art is no less difficult to master, no less exacting a task driver, and far more difficult, indeed, to secure proper practice in; for it is only on the stage that his product can be fully judged, and it is just on the stage that he cannot place it till his product is finished and matured. Nevertheless he will not be discouraged. He will "play the sedulous ape" to Shakespeare and to Ibsen and to Dumas and to Scribe. He will repose on the bosom of Jones. He will build and rebuild and then tear down. And if he should get his work back from the managers, or if it should secure a production and fail on the stage, he would merely say that he had not yet learned to build a play, and go back to his practice. Thus the born dramatist. He needs no advice; he will follow the star of his

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destiny willy nilly. And nothing can stop his ultimate "arrival."

But the man who makes plays not from born instinct, not because his imagination casts everything into the dramatic mould, but because somebody else has written plays that brought a fortune, or just because, maybe, it seems a pleasant and "artistic" thing to do, because, in short, he has inhaled the horrid yellow germ — that man scorns practice, would sit down and write a great drama at the first try, would have it that a noble and intricate and baffling art can be mastered in a moment or by anybody. It is he who raises the cry of ignorance and stupidity when his manuscript comes back to him. It is he who blames the public or the actors or both when his bad plays fail. It is he who wanders in our Alley — so says the scientist — with the voice of a martyr, declaring against the hosts of the Philistines. Samson's weapon seems to be less effective now. Meanwhile, again says our scientist, even as he is displaying this symptom of the dread disease, the born playwright (who is, after all, the only immune) is at home at his practice, saying nothing, not at all sure that he knows how to write a play, but keeping at it just the same.

So the disease works in every city, in every town that boasts an "opera house," in every

college that boasts an English department. There seem to be no adequate preventive sanitary precautions, still less no cure. But perhaps there is a compensation. For every rejected manuscript, every failure of false or immature or ignorant work upon the stage, every piece of knock-kneed philosophy or vapid humor or clumsy craftsmanship sent to the dust heap, above all every thwarted attempt of little minded men to foist their feeble personalities into the theater, but shows anew the triumphant intricacy and conquering truth of the dramatic art.

THE CONFESSIONS OF A CRITIC

ENTITLE a dramatic essay The Confessions of a Critic and there will not be wanting those to tell you it should consist of a diet list and a record of the digestion. Broadway hath no fury like an actress scored. Players, living, working, breathing in the concentrated atmosphere of personalities, whose measure of success, even in cold dollars and cents as salary, is personal popularity, quite naturally find it hard to realize the utter impersonality of the critic's judgments, of themselves as much as of the play. It is an unfortunate feature of dramatic and musical criticism that names have to be used, the names of sensitive men and women who yet must be treated as if they were but parts in a machine. That is one of their tragedies — when critical comment is adverse! But their comment on the critic, their references to his digestion, being less public, are not one of his tragedies.

His tragedies are of a more subtle kind; and mostly they consist in dim forebodings, half realizations that the stage conventions he up-

holds, the rules of drama he measures by, the standards he affects are sham. And yet he does not see how the stage can do without them. Every attempt to do without them he watches with a secret passionate expectation; and it always fails. Ever the facts tell him he is wrong; ever a blind, struggling instinct within himself tells him he is somehow right. He does not know which to believe, what to believe. This sets his face eagerly toward the future, which is surely a good, but otherwise he can see no good to come of it. He too longs to be a Master Builder. This young, urging critical conscience of his (for such a symbol may *Hilda* be, and let the rabid Ibsenites rejoice!) demands its castle, its castle "on the table." But it is a "castle in the air," indeed. He cannot reach it. The parted mists again close round its shadow battlements. And that is his tragedy.

What are some of the dramatic conventions he upholds, in moments of doubt, perhaps, with the greater insistence, as something tangible, at least? Set down in a row, they have a certain platitudinous impressiveness, like a catalogue of the virtues. "The necessary exaggeration of the stage;" "the drama must be a contest between wills;" "a drama must appeal to many classes, or rather to a common element in the classes, because the individual

loses his identity in the crowd, a new 'psychology of the mob' taking its place" — this, of course, meaning the dominance of the so-called "primitive passions"; "exposition is best made by action, not conversation;" "it is not the mission of the theater to preach;" and once again, "the necessary exaggeration of the stage." These are not all. If they only were! Art is indeed long, even in its list of rules. But they fairly enough represent the rest.

"The necessary exaggeration of the stage" — over and over that phrase sings itself in the critic's ears and worms itself into his written words and comes to haunt him with a kind of ironic fatality, because he recognizes it as at once the truest and the most false — for there are degrees of truth and falsity, let grammar say what it will — of all theatric conventions. That the stage has its exaggeration no sane man will deny. That the exaggeration is still necessary perhaps no sane one will. But that it ought to be necessary, that the stage gains by the exaggeration, that dramatic art is not removed from life, weakened in its profoundest appeal by the exaggeration, the critic has his doubts. And, doubting that convention, he comes to doubt all the others, interwrought as they are, dependent one upon the other.

It does not matter if the play is "Othello," or "The Great Divide," or "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray." If the critic has not killed his wife through jealousy, or tried to commit rape, or wedded a woman with a purple past — and most critics, mild, humdrum creatures at heart, have done none of these things — there comes a day when each of these plays profoundly dissatisfies, when it is so far from the still chambers of reality in his breast that he watches the stage with wonder, amazed that this drama could ever have seemed to him beautiful or real. Such an experience, often unanalysed and always difficult of analysis, so vague is it, so half-conscious, is deeply disquieting. It leaves a sense of doubt and loss behind, the loss of faith in that dramatic art which has for him been the main attention of his life, the field of his activities, the source of his inspirations. The play is "Othello." How often has he dilated on its marvelous technique, the "inevitable march" of its action, the passion and fire of it, the pathos and power. But suddenly this technical perfection has become something which has blinded him, this passion and fire something that has dazzled, so that he has never before seen how coarse and poor and false a thing lay beneath. Jealousy? Is this jealousy, this fury of thwarted possession, this homicidal rage of a negro, incited by a mon-

ster in human shape? Shall he write scathingly, in the approved fashion, of the Italian Novelli's performance, which makes of *Othello* an infuriated gorilla, almost like Bimi in Kipling's gruesome story? That would please his public, who regard "Othello" as he has always done, babbling of its "dignity" and "nobility." But for once his hand is stayed.

For what is jealousy to him? What is it, after all, to the finer conscience of his age and race? Not a blind, brute passion that suspects, that listens to no reason, that knows no faith nor trust, that brands the beloved one with the vilest epithet, that finally does murder, utter and cruel. Such it may be to the apes; such it doubtless was to the Cave Man; Nero may have known it so. But for him it is something quite otherwise. For him its terrible tragedy comes not because it drives him through suspicion and unfaith to murder, but simply because it shows him as in a lightning flash the Sundering Flood that rolls between personalities, even between two souls that love. Through jealousy, he stretches out pathetic hands over that Sundering Flood; but bridge it he never can. Though his faith in his beloved be as everlasting as the hills, he has seen that her real self he can never touch, her real soul never know. He can never see what she sees, he

can never feel what she feels. What has the tragedy of *Desdemona's* murder by an infuriated baboon to do with this spiritual tragedy of the deep, still places of his soul? Less than nothing. For once he leaves the theater with a sense of great relief, glad of any escape into reality, if only the garish reality of Broadway and its gleaming signs.

And perhaps he goes home, stands irresolute before his book shelves, and finally takes down "The Treasure of the Humble." And therein he finds the momentary comfort of agreement, for he reads:

"To the tragic author, it is only the violence of the anecdote that appeals, and in the representation thereof does the entire interest of his work consist. And he imagines, forsooth, that we shall delight in witnessing the very same acts that brought joy to the hearts of the barbarians, with whom murder, outrage, and treachery were matters of daily occurrence. . . . Indeed, when I go to the theater I feel as though I were spending a few hours with my ancestors, who conceived life as something that was primitive, arid, and brutal; but this conception of theirs scarcely even lingers in my memory, and surely it is not one that I can share. I am shown a deceived husband killing his wife, a woman poisoning her lover, a son avenging his father, a father slaughtering his children, children putting their father to death, murdered kings, ravished virgins, imprisoned citizens, — in a word, all the sublimity of tradition, but alas, how superficial and material!

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. . . I had hoped to be shown some act of life, traced back to its sources and to its mystery by connecting links, that my daily occupations afford me neither power nor occasion to study. I had gone thither hoping that the beauty, the grandeur, and the earnestness of my humble day-by-day existence would, for one instant, be revealed to me, that I would be shown the I know not what presence, power, or God that is ever with me in my room. I was yearning for one of the strange moments of a higher life that flit unperceived through my dreariest hours; whereas, almost invariably, all that I beheld was but a man who would tell me at wearisome length why he was jealous, why he poisoned, or why he killed."

Solacing words, till suddenly the reflection comes, "But what sort of plays has this man Maeterlinck himself written?" "Mona Vanna?" A tragedy of lust and murder — the beauty but the blood of Renaissance Italy. "The Death of Tintagiles?" A shiver in five acts, the physical horror of death. "Pélléas et Mélisande?" The old, old story of Paolo and Francesca, of physical desire, in which we are "shown a deceived husband killing his wife." "The Blind?" One long assault on the nerves, stabs in the dark, the refinement of terror. What act of life is really here traced back to its sources? Shadow wings there are of things intangible; but for the most part, in spite of his mysticism, Maeterlinck as dramatist reverts to type, goes back for

the evening to his ancestors. The "static theater" he preaches he but ineffectively practices. ✓

Does "the necessary exaggeration of the stage" mean, then, that only such actions and episodes are dramatic as show men and women in violent conflict or emotion? The clever climax is that which brings down the curtain when the audience is most curious to learn what will happen next. Must their curiosity always be aroused by the sight of two men facing each other on the stage with fists clenched, must their curiosity be to discover whether the heroine escaped from the villain's chambers with her metaphorical white robe still unstained? Is to be dramatic to show the exceptional, to catch life at its most violent points? And must there always be conflict, "the conflict between wills"? Has the stage no place for the humble picture of daily life, where conflict may not exist at all, for the lyric reaches of tranquillity and reflection, for the soul, where the tragedies are not of blood and action? Ellen Terry on her last visit to America produced a drama from Holland called "The Good Hope." Its most memorable scene showed the fishers' wives sitting at their work, trying to converse of commonplace things. But always the Sea, the gray, hungry Sea, would creep into their discourse, and one by one they would forget

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to work, forget to speak, gazing out at the Monster that was raging in storm. Then they would pull themselves away from the tacitly forbidden topic, only once again to yield, for the Monster lay at the back of all their thoughts; for them it was God and Devil, destiny and devourer. In this scene, at once tragic and humble, quiet as life itself, with no bustle of "action" nor clash of wills, was the finest worth of the play. And the play failed. But must it always be so?

Max Beerbohm calls the play where "nothing happens," where a picture of life and character supplants the story of violent and improbable action, "adramatic." There are beginning to be such plays even in America. In the novel and short story the "adramatic" tale has long been familiar, and, far from being despised, it is now valued quite as highly as the romance or the story of suspense. The writer of fiction does not have to seize hold on violent emotions, to set his people into the clash of conflict, to seduce and murder and steal and cheat. But the play-house lags far along behind. How seldom is a play written without a "villain." Yet how seldom for you or me or those we know are the serious events of our lives, even the catastrophes, brought about by the purposeful plotting of some fiend

in human shape. Even Ibsen could not get along without his villains till almost the end of his career, though he struggled hard and did much toward reform. We smile at the stock figures of vice and virtue in popular melodrama; but our Broadway plays are only a step higher. We are still far from realizing that in reality each man is his own hero and villain, that the true conflicts are within.

Not long ago Maude Adams played "Twelfth Night" at Harvard University on the bare stage of Sanders Theater, after what the Harvard English department supposed to have been the Elizabethan manner. To me there was something almost pathetic in thus stripping the play down to its essentials, for it emerged a fragile, child-figure, almost trivial in its puny prettiness. Scenes of roaring farce there were, such farce as only Shakespeare ever wrote, and the infinite grace of language, and that vivid life-likeness to the characters that is, after all, what makes Shakespeare supreme. But grace of language and vividness of character are qualities that may be found quite as well in the poem or the novel. What is essentially of the stage in the play, the unfolding of a story or the setting forth of an aspect of life in terms of living act and gesture, seemed suddenly not only trivial but absurd. This con-

fusion of brother and sister, this pretty masquerade of *Viola* as a boy, so utterly impossible, so infantile and foolish, seemed in spite of the grace of its manner almost unworthy of serious attention. I caught myself looking with amazement at the men and women about me, so learned in literature, whose beaming smiles denoted complete satisfaction. Was something wrong with me, I wondered? Or was it that the stage in their lives occupies a much less important place than in mine, that their adult and deeper interests lie elsewhere, are otherwise satisfied, so that an evening in the theater is for them — as for how many of us! — a kind of lapse into make-believe land, into the easy faith and careless unreality of childhood? Should that be the attitude of all of us toward the theater, should we all be Elizabethans, grown-up, unreflecting children in the play-house, even to-day, putting aside our sense of reality, our deeper desires, when we enter its portals and ignoring what advance the drama has painfully won through successive generations? Judging not historically but absolutely, should we find “*Twelfth Night*” wholly great, wholly satisfying, should we fail to detect in its theatrical falsities and unreality signs of the childhood of the race?

Unless we do detect them, unless we de-

mand of our modern playwrights a method and a reality commensurate with our growth and development in other branches of human activity, life will leap ever farther ahead of the theater and the theater will become an ever-lessening force to reckon with. How relative are all our rules of dramatic construction is, after all, pretty apparent to-day. What does the utter banishment of the "aside" and the soliloquy mean if not that the modern audience has done away with one more convention, made one more "necessary exaggeration" not only unnecessary but absurd? What does the tremendous success of "The College Widow" mean if not that a play can be enjoyed for its truthful pictorial quality, dispensing almost entirely with the "contest between wills"? What does the steady growth of realistic American drama mean if not that a public tired of endless repetitions of theatrical story are hungry not for exaggeration but reality, not for childish make-believe but truth? What does the popularity of G. B. Shaw mean if not that conversation on the stage may be quite as interesting, quite as significant, as "action"? What does the success of "The Servant in the House" mean if not that the stage can preach? We used to draw hard and fast lines between the classes of drama; there was farce, comedy, tragedy, melodrama.

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Now such distinctions are rapidly disappearing, not so much because the classes tend to flow together as because farce and tragedy alike are recognized as unreal, inhuman, and are vanishing from the earth, while melodrama is sinking to the level of the ten-cent houses, where it has a hard time to hold its own with moving pictures. Now we have simply drama, grave or gay, or sometimes both. Farce was never even a necessary exaggeration, it was a wilful perversion of life. At the present time audiences will have nothing to do with it. What once amused our fathers now seems preposterous to us, a kind of insult to our intelligences. When we must be silly that way, we join farce to music and are inane to rag-time. Musical comedy is not to be scorned. It is a valuable outlet for our trivial moods, a safety valve on the boiler of our thoughtless merriment. It protects the drama. Tragedy, in the old formal sense, is as surely doomed as farce. A. B. Walkley somewhere speaks of Aristotle's "apology of tragedy as a cathartic." But it is no longer a cathartic for the modern man. Its blood and physical death are primitive to the point of disgust. Even the stately religious aspect of the Greek tragedy can hardly redeem those lugubrious dramas from their pre-Christian bloodthirstiness. Shall we suppose that Christianity practiced, however

imperfectly, for nineteen hundred years has had no effect upon us in our attitude toward the drama, though every other attitude of our lives has been moulded by it? Death is still a tragedy, perhaps the greatest of all tragedies, — the eternal tragedy of man. But death comes to most of us now, like birth and growth, rain and sunlight, as a part of the natural order, not inflicted violently upon us by our fellows. Its tragedy lies in the contemplation and the wonder. Violence and murder are very far away from most of us. There is something pitifully archaic in the classic tragedy. "Hamlet" ceases to be moving when the dead begin to heap up on the stage. At best, death in the modern drama inspires a shudder of physical repugnance. What stirs us lies all before or after. Not what end a man meets but what use he makes of his life before he dies is now what interests us, or what effect he has left on those behind. The tragedy of "Ghosts" is not the horrible death of *Oswald* but the horrible cause of it. Here is no human vengeance wreaking itself in murder, even though under the Greek disguise of divine agency. Nor does "Ghosts" pretend to "purge the emotions through pity and fear;" it is the scientific example of the dissecting room. A modern tragedy is Pinero's "Iris," a remorseless study of the dissolution

of a woman's soul. And the tragedy is just here, that *Iris* did not die, that she went on living. Perhaps death is not a tragedy, after all. Perhaps for us heavy-eyed children of the Twentieth Century life is the tragedy. Such doubts, at any rate, have sounded the knell for the so-called tragedy of the classic theater. A modern audience cannot endure its unreality.

Reality! Over and over that test has been applied to the drama throughout this book, and over and over men and women are applying it in the theater to-day, even if the stage villain does continue to flourish and bring about absurd catastrophes, even if actors and actresses do strut and pose and go through their "emotional scenes" without any relation to normal human conduct, even if playwrights do twist and bend their stories into situations that carry the largest amount of superficial excitement and the least amount of significant truth. Why this reality? Why this reiterated insistence on fact? The stage is not reality and cannot be. Pasteboard trees have no sap, E. H. Sothern is not *Don Quixote*; indeed, *Don Quixote* himself never *was*. Granted that the drama is a game, a make-believe, why in this world of too, too stubborn facts shall we not permit it the blessed license of fancy, shall we not bid it bear us down the flowery paths of unreality,

making heroes out of common stuff and heaven out of earth — or at any rate an evening of forgetfulness? No, the stage is not reality; in spite of its living, moving actors, its statues come to life and its language made oral, it still demands an act of the imagination from the beholder. But its supreme merit as an art form lies in the reduction of this demand to the least possible point, leaving scope for a vivid, direct, and passionate appeal like no other. It is above all other art forms capable of carrying the semblance of reality; above all other art forms to carry the semblance of reality rests upon it in consequence as a duty. For the world now knows that reality is forever in the making. What we called real yesterday is unreal to-day; truth is what we would have it, reality will only be perfect as we shape it so. To deny the mission of the stage, one of man's most cherished fields of æsthetic endeavor, in this high task of remoulding the world "nearer to the heart's desire," — the real world, not the make-believe, — to call it from the work for which it is above all other art forms fitted and set it the trivial task of aping unrealities, is to deny the laws of change and growth, to belittle the power of the æsthetic imagination, hopelessly to undervalue the worth of the dramatic form.

It would be, perhaps, a humorless proceeding to obtrude a philosophic discussion of the plastic nature of truth, the relativity of reality, in a book on the Broadway Theater. And perhaps, too, a philosophic discussion by the present critic would be rather more of a confession than he cares to make! Yet there is something to be said for any attempt to apply in action a philosophic method; belief in a philosophy (as in a religion) is of very little value except as it results in deeds. Fired with the words of Dewey and Schiller and James, a critic of the drama cannot greatly respect himself if he does not seek to carry into his own little field of investigation the sanitary methods these men have adapted from the common-sense procedure of the ages and given a philosophic sanction. And, for the critic of the drama, what is most valuable and helpful in the Pragmatic method is the assumption that reality, which "is in general what truths have to take account of," is not something absolute, independent, changeless from the beginning, but something plastic, not so much "discovered" as "made" by us. Schiller says, "For us Reality is really incomplete; and that it is so is our fondest hope. For what this means is that Reality can still be remade, *and made perfect!*" And elsewhere he says, "*Mere knowing always alters reality, so far at least*

as one party to the transaction is concerned. Knowing always really alters the knower; and as the knower is real and a part of reality, *reality is really altered.* Even, therefore, what we call a mere 'discovery' of reality involves a *real change* in us, and a real enlightenment of our ignorance. And inasmuch as this will probably induce a real difference in our subsequent behavior, it entails a real alteration in the course of cosmic events, the extent of which may be considerable, while its importance may be enormous."

In his lectures on Pragmatism Professor James points out that while we can admit of no variation in our sensations, which bring in to us the sense of reality, while "over their nature, order and quality we have as good as no control," yet *which* sensations we attend to "depends on our own interests; and according as we lay the emphasis here or there, quite different formulations of truth result." The same battle with its "same fixed details" spells victory for one side, defeat for the other. The same world spells victory to the optimist, defeat to the pessimist. No new fact ever comes to us without being sifted, tested, thrown into perspective by the sum of our previous knowledge, by our own reasoning. "When we talk of reality 'independent' of human thinking, then, it seems a thing very hard to find. It

reduces to the notion of what is just entering into experience and yet to be named, or else to some imagined aboriginal presence in experience, before any belief about the presence had arisen, before any human conception had been applied. It is what is absolutely dumb and evanescent, the merely ideal limit of our minds. We may glimpse it, but we never grasp it; what we grasp is always some substitute for it which previous human thinking has peptonized and coked for our consumption."

How different a thing does this make of the term realism as applied to the drama from the ordinary conception of theatrical realism! Real pumps, real water, real flower-pots may or may not be a part of it, according to the popular mood of the hour; it does not matter. All art is representative, not necessarily imitative. The realism I would mean now consists in the representation on the stage of the important facts of life which square with men's possible experience, with the reality which makes up not the shell of our world but its heart and fiber, with emotions, beliefs, impulses, actions, so that by detaching these facts in the playhouse, boiling away extraneous matter, setting them forth in the high relief of an art work, the facts may be assimilated into the previous knowledge of the beholder, enlarging his con-

ception of truth, altering for him his reality. Specifically, if a playwright concocts a "part" for a star, devising a series of situations that enable her to weep, to laugh, to coquette, to do a little dance, and finally to fall happily and automatically in her lover's arms, it does not matter if he has a thousand real pumps pumping real water in his play, or, as Clyde Fitch did in "Captain Jinks," a faithfully copied setting of some actual building known to the audience. He is not a realist. He is adding nothing to our sum total of reality. He is giving us nothing of the stuff that significant truths have to take account of. But if he presents on the stage an actual picture of some corner of life that he has observed (whether his pumps are pasteboard or wood), either George Ade's "fresh water" college or Gorky's "Night Refuge"; or if he draws characters that live because every word and emotion strikes a response in our breasts, as in the plays of Shakespeare; or if he shows us soul states that disturb us as possible states of our own souls, as did Moody in "The Great Divide," he is in so far a realist, for he is dealing with the stuff that significant truths have to take account of. Shall we never have done with this idea that realism in art means only pointing a camera at a pig-sty? Is Ade's "At-water" any less real than Gorky's "Night

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Refuge" because of its radiant cheerfulness? The tone of the realism depends on the temper of the realist, which is but another proof that truth and reality are man-made. The realist is any artist who deals not with material that has no counterpart outside the theater, and so is of no practical consequence to anybody, but with the facts of the larger world. His own temper, however, will color his presentation. Our tempers will still further change what he has given us. And thus the play-house can aid in shaping reality, in moving this old world on. When we demand reality in the drama what we really demand is that the drama shall be a part of our actual lives, not "a sleep and a forgetting." "The College Widow" and "The Night Refuge" gave us diametrically opposed pictures, but because each of them dealt with reality there followed from each a distinct reaction; from the one toward cheerfulness and hope, from the other toward gloom and despair; together they deepened the mystery of this human life of ours, they altered our sum total of reality. What reaction follows from "My Wife," or Ethel Barrymore's recent vehicle, "Her Sister," or Belasco's "Rose of the Rancho," or any one of a thousand machines for the stimulation of easy theatrical interest or excitement? None whatever. They litter the stage. They are

theatrical rubbish, fit only for the slag heap of eternity.

But if such dramas are quite demonstrably false and worthless because by their failure to square with the realities of life they have no beneficial effects, *they will not work*, there is another sort of drama that does work, that does have a beneficial effect, although it, too, fails to square at least with the objective realities of life. I refer, of course, to the poetic drama, and to the romance of the supernatural, — to “Peter Pan,” or “Peer Gynt,” or “The Tempest.” What are we to say of such plays? Well, so far as they work, as they give us uplift and pleasure without doing violence to our beliefs about reality, such plays must correspond to something within, not outside, ourselves. It would make only for hopeless confusion to call them, in a different or higher sense, realistic. But a study of them will show that when they are successful their verse, though verse does not correspond to any external reality, does no violence to eternal reality in the emotions it expresses, being only successful when coupled with exalted moods; or that their supernatural elements are so adjusted to the known real that they can be dissociated or taken as symbols. *Ariel* flies, but *Miranda* walks on solid earth. *Peter Pan* is a symbol to us grown-ups of the dear, lost days

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of childhood. As our own thoughts, beliefs, dreams, ideals, not only shape reality but are a part of the reality shaped, the supernatural, symbolism, poetry are, of course, realities, and so far as they make us better or happier they are true. In this larger sense "Peer Gynt" is as realistic as "Hedda Gabler." Only we must be sure that the dramas which try to embody them do make us better or happier. Else they are false as "Her Sister."

Walter Pater, in his famous Conclusion to "The Renaissance," said: "Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested or otherwise, which come naturally to many of us. Only be sure it is passion — that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake." He feared at first that the lofty Hedonism of these words might be misconstrued and work injury. His is very far from the Hedonism of the shop girl, buried in a love scene by Laura Jean Libby. Pater would not have found the highest quality in a moment that detached him alike from objec-

tive reality and that sense of nobility, of spiritual value, in the subjective dream which is alone what gives it its truth. The subjective dream, in fact, is always dangerous, even for the greatest minds; its value has frequently to be tested, in this common-sense world, by reference to external reality. We yield easy faith in the theater. We can afford to dispense with this test only on rare occasions. We are only too ready to accept "The Jesters" for poetry, or to declare as we weep with some "emotional actress" in a silly, artificial play that we are experiencing a great spiritual release.

Perhaps, indeed, there is really no such thing as art for art's sake. Art presupposes two human attitudes, — that of artist and of beholder. The artist himself may be the beholder, but that does not alter the case. Art exists in answer to a human need, for humanity. It is man's reflection on himself and on his environment, on the sum total, that is to say, of his reality. It is man's idea of what reality is or his dream of what it should be. It can be, therefore — nay, it must be, to be genuine art — a potent factor in shaping reality. The man who flees to it away from life, thus altering his own existence, himself a part of reality, or the man who consciously uses it, as Charles Rann Kennedy uses "The Servant in

the House," as an agent in the world's work, is alike confessing it a force to mould reality. The more of reality the drama thus contains, the more of truth, that is, to the facts of experience, the more powerful it may be in shaping the truth, the reality, of to-morrow. If in this book I have seemed sometimes scornful of the poetic drama, insisting on a realism that appeared to preclude the higher reaches of the fancy and the imagination, it is not because I do not respect poetry, but because I respect it too highly to view with any patience the usual masquerade of poetry in the play-house. It is vastly more difficult to bring forth a truth from within than to picture it from without. But no difficulty will deter the destined poet. If his vision is true, if it will bring real uplift and strength to humanity, he will make it known, and no words of any little critic can stop him. But just now we seem neither to have a poet with the needed power of vision nor a public in the mood to find a greater help in the inner vision than the objective reality. We are only on the threshold of a drama of any kind. To carry even external reality that drama finds a puzzling task. The old conventions of the stage, the exaggerations of the actors, the preoccupation with violent emotions and unusual episodes, with artificial excitement and improbable fable, the traditional insistence

of the drama on the need for "action," always "action," have done much to alienate the thoughtful modern man from the theater altogether. And because, in men's minds, the romance and the poetic play are associated not so much with truth to an inner vision as allegiance to just these unrealities of stage convention, they are the least fitted at present to lead the theater forward. Our stage must creep closer to life, it must eliminate the smell of the scene loft, not by substituting "real" scenery but real episodes, real emotions, real fable; it must strive ever, not to violate the facts of experience and so lead us nowhere, but to picture the facts of experience and so lead us to a better understanding of them, to a new shaping of reality. Only thus can the stage escape the ultimate contempt of intelligent men and women. We no longer go to the theater — some of us — in the child-like spirit of the Elizabethans, even of our own fathers. Our attitude has changed, changed far more than the drama. We have made much of the old truth a lie. And unless the drama changes to meet our new attitude it will sink everywhere to the level of heedless amusement, where the vulgar and ignorant theatrical managers of New York already suppose it to be. And that change can only be made by incessantly applying the test of fact, by constantly throwing

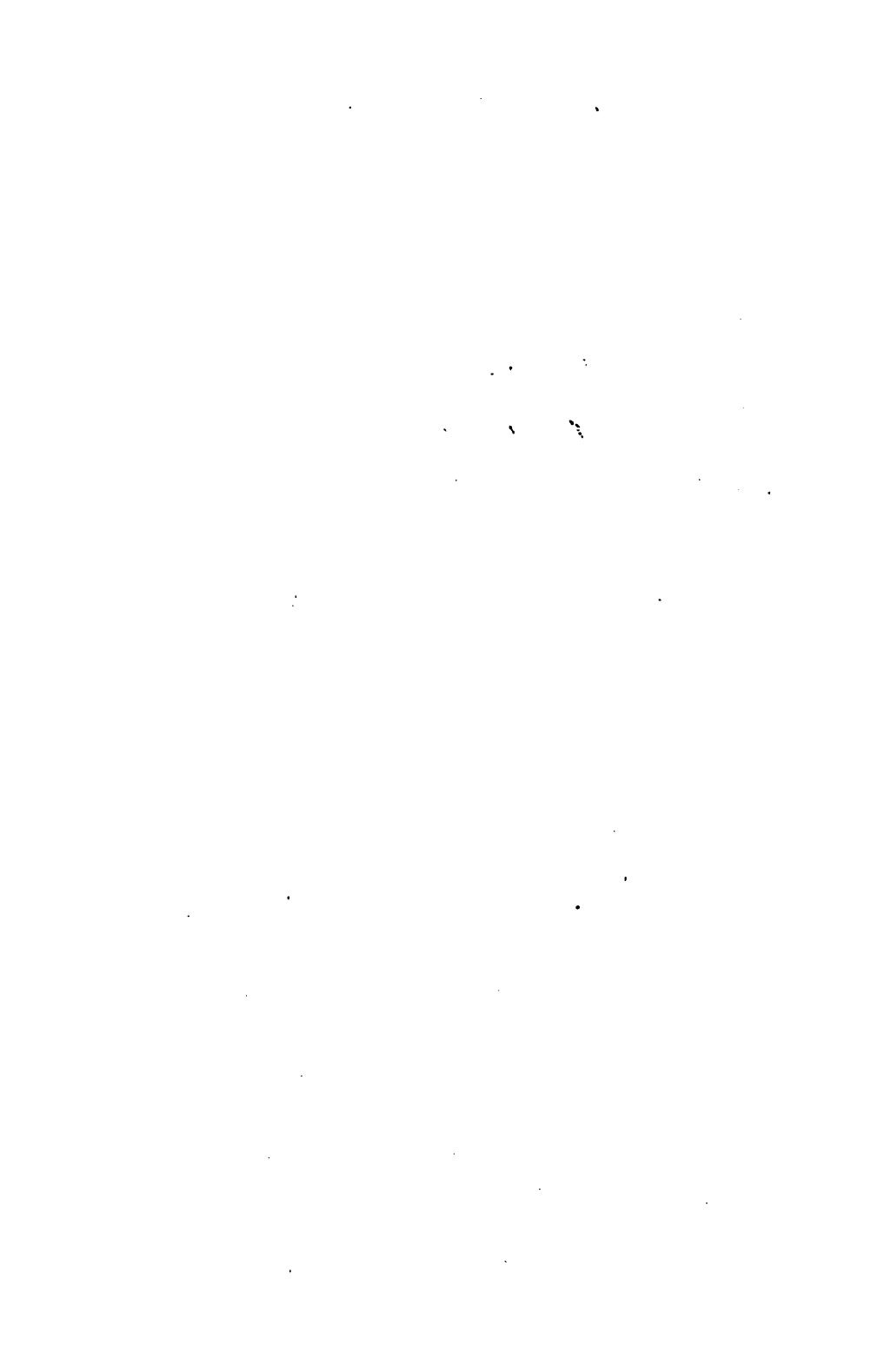
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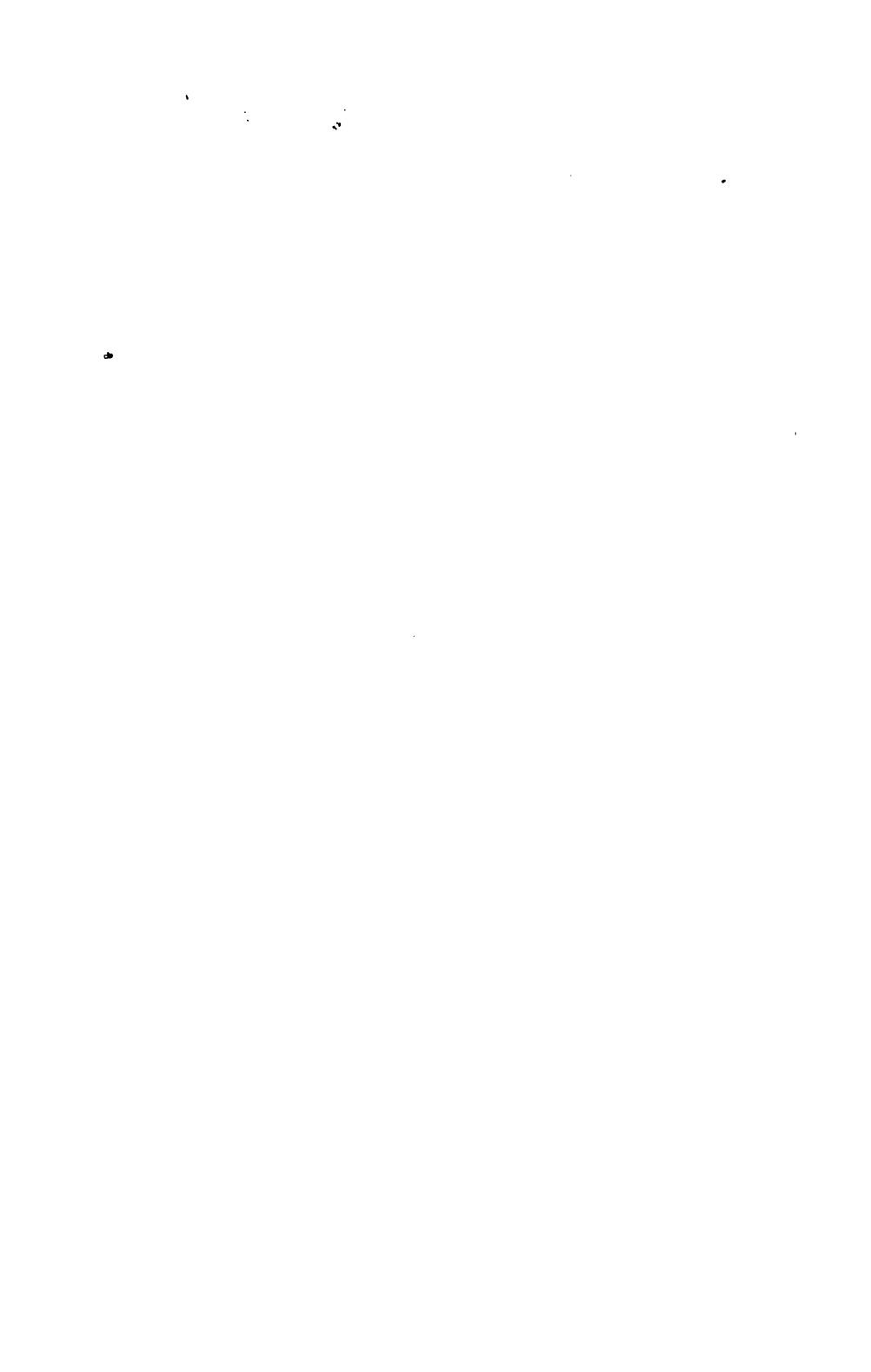
overboard every convention, however honorable with age, that brings into the drama for the modern man the slightest taint of unreality. We do not know what the drama of to-morrow will be; nor do we know what the truth of to-morrow will be. But they will surely be something different, and let us have the courage to believe that through our human efforts they will be something better.

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